

PLATE I



GIOVANNA TORNABUONI AND THE VIRGIN  
Fresco by Botticelli, Escorial Duria, in the Louvre,

Frontispiece

# CELEBRITIES OF THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE IN FLORENCE *and in the* LOUVRE

BY

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## *INTRODUCTION*

WHEN LOOKING at the pictures in a museum or at the frescoes in an old church, we sometimes notice, amongst the impersonal heads of saints, angels, gods, nymphs, satyrs, spectators and executioners, some particular face which makes us say "That's a portrait!" Why? We cannot say, but we feel no doubt about it. It is as though we recognized, in the face, characteristics so individual, so particular and therefore so alive that we feel that the painter could not possibly have drawn them from imagination, but must have taken them "from the life," to use an old phrase. And we are right. This face, which catches our eye among all the others, which stands out from them as though telling us "I exist. I have existed. I am not an academic formula as my neighbours are. I have lived!" is in fact a portrait. But of whom? At that point our powers of intuition stop short, and unless we have the leisure to solve the problem the question remains unanswered.

On other occasions when confronted with some authentic and well-known portrait, of which both the artist and his model are known with historical certainty, do we not wish to know something more about it? A name is all very well, but after all,

what is a name but a synonym for a career? Who was this man or woman? What meaning is there behind this costume, this symbol, this gesture? And above all, what, in real life, was the tendency, the physiognomic or physiological trait which the artist has here indicated? What is emphasized by this crease, this scar, this wrinkle?

For the majority, then, there are many celebrated faces about which nothing is known. What is celebrated is the mask: we are ignorant, as a rule, of the face—by which I mean the character, the rôle, the career. In some cases we do not know the name; in other cases, though we know the name, it conveys nothing to us. Nevertheless, it would seem that so striking a face must have had a characteristic story. We are a little irritated at not knowing that story, and when we leave the museum or the church our pleasure is tinged with regret—the after-taste of a curiosity which has not been satisfied.

Out of that curiosity this book was born. For a long time past I, too, was haunted by these curious masks, which are so personal that they cannot be mistaken for others, these portraits of the XVth and earlier part of the XVIth centuries in Italy: expressions, for instance, such as that of Baldassare Castiglione in the Louvre; gestures, such as that of Giovanna Tornabuoni, in the fresco on the Escalier Daru, or that of la Bella Simonetta in the *Spring* in the Academy at Florence; profiles such as that of Isabella d'Este, in the room containing Leonardo da Vinci's

drawings, ecstatic poses, such as that of the knight in armour kneeling before the Madonna of Victory, or a more worldly scene, such as the arrival of that beautiful lady, in starched, formal clothes, who is following Saint Elizabeth, in the choir of Santa Maria Novella. For many years I used to look at them simply for the pleasure which I derived from their beauty, and without searching for anything more than the artist's attitude towards Nature, the play of light and shade, the scope of the design, the colour scheme. I never asked their names. There seemed to me no more necessity to know their names in order to love them, than to know the names of the stars or of flowers, nor did their charm lose anything through their being anonymous and mysterious.

There came a day, however, when, in considering them from an æsthetic point of view, I became obsessed with their physiognomic characteristics. This was because the æsthetic study of a human face necessarily includes a definition of its character, and because it is impossible to specify its construction and its expression without being led on to notice in what way it is different from others something, in fact, which one might call its "mark of dissimilarity" from the Race. This "mark of dissimilarity" once found, æsthetically speaking, one wants to know what it signifies from the moral point of view, and one goes on to guess what is revealed by emphasis, by a blemish, by a dissymmetry, by exaggeration what passions, what caprices, what high human qualities, what grossness, perhaps,

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are here disclosed. . . . And having let one's imagination loose, one tries to check and verify one's inductions by the facts. One wanders hither and thither in the past; one seeks an answer in the Archives and in the very stones. This, in truth, is no longer *Æsthetics*: it is History, but history of such a kind that one is inclined to study it as an æsthetic problem.

One is all the more inclined when a second question immediately follows the first. Having said: "How like portraits these faces are!" one then says: "How like our contemporaries these portraits are!" For human features, infinitely diverse as Nature may be, all reduce themselves to certain clearly defined types—bony, muscular or full-blooded. To these types the brush of the masters of painting has long ago assigned a key-stroke or essential outline. In fact, one may well ask oneself why people still trouble to have their portraits painted. For these portraits, almost always, exist already, and very frequently are signed by some Old Master; and there is scarcely a face to be met with in the street to-day which has not its "double" or a striking resemblance to it in some remote corner of a museum, in a corner of a fresco on the walls of some church in this old Europe of ours. . . . And then there naturally arises this question: "Does this also apply to what we may call our moral physiognomy? Is the latter our own, or has it already existed in the past exactly the same as we see it amongst us now?"

Our minds, in fact, are invincible in their inclination to believe themselves new. Each generation has the feeling that it is bringing into the world curiosities, appetites, refinements—whether of fancy, or of moral elegance or of vice—of which its predecessors knew nothing. We can resign ourselves to having the same type of face as our forefathers, but we are vain enough to put ourselves to the expense of a new kind of soul. Each of us believes that the world is seeing him for the first time. And when, in the grey depths of our monotonous lives, there is disclosed to us the disquieting silhouette of a sphinx, one of those figures which excite the crowd by the mystery of their aspirations and the perversity of their attitudes, the general feeling is that we are in the presence of a specific product of our age. But is this really so? Do the souls of bygone ages differ from our own any more than their faces do? Such is the second question which naturally confronts us when we stand before these portraits.

One cannot pretend to answer it in one word, but the answer is perhaps less difficult here than elsewhere. For if there is one spot on earth and one instant in the flight of time where and when one can obtain corresponding information on "masks" and on "faces," on traits of physiology and on traits of character, it is in Italy in the second half of the XVth and the first half of the XVIth centuries. The portraits of the Flemish primitives or of Holbein possess thoroughly characterized

masks, but it is difficult to get to know their souls because the bourgeois or the clerics there represented did not, for the most part, make any profound impression on the memory of mankind. The souls of XVIIIth-century France and of the Revolution are well known to us, but it is difficult to imagine their real faces: the portraits of that epoch were almost all subjected to a common test of classic or "piquant" beauty and given the same sugary coating. The Italian Renaissance was the only period in which every illustrious face found a master artist to paint it, and in which every physiological career, so to speak, was summed up in the narrow frame of a panel, in the turn of a bust or in the outline on a medal. The portrait painters and sculptors of that time were named Piero della Francesca, Pollajuolo, Pisanello, Ambrogio de Predis, Ghirlandajo, Botticelli, Verrocchio, Mino de Fiesole, Mantegna, Donatello, Pinturicchio. . . . What eyes to see and what hands to perpetuate what their eyes had seen! Such witnesses were not only great: they were truthful. They were already sufficiently masters of their art to reproduce what they found in their models, but still too dependent upon their models to add what they had not actually found, and to attach to them, at the expense of "likeness" an artificial concept of beauty. Thus the portraits of that time are not interchangeable as, for example, are those of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. It is impossible to mistake the Duke of Urbino for Sigismund Malatesta or Isotta de Rimini for

Beatrice d'Este! The profiles of Ludovic the Moor, of Filippo Strozzi, of Lorenzo the Magnificent, of the Marquis Gonzaga are worth as much as their signatures. When one comes across them in different works by different hands, one finds that they are identical and almost superimposable, and one can no longer doubt that one has before one's eyes a perfect physiognomic document.

At the same time, and by a coincidence almost unique in history, it so happens that besides these masks reproduced by the painters, we possess a collection of intimate, familiar documents which reveal the faces to us. The people of this era were in the habit of keeping journals that of Luca Landucci, his *Diario Fiorentino*, for instance, has often been of service to historians of the Florentine revolutions. They published *Consigli*, or practical instructions for their children, following the example given them, a century earlier, by that Paolo di Pace da Certaldo, whose delightful treatise on "good examples" and "good manners" has been unearthed by M. Guido Biagi. They were great letter writers, too, of this Alessandra dei Macinghi, whose letters to her children are well known, is an instance. Finally, the reports of the ambassadors to their Governments, especially to that of Venice, though not exactly intimate documents, are almost so in the freedom of their appreciations, the picturesqueness of their descriptions and the secrets suggested by their gossip.

If one adds that several of these worthies were

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poets, and that venerable matrons such as Lucrezia de Medici, statesmen such as her son Lorenzo the Magnificent, courtesans such as Tullia d'Aragon, diplomatists such as Castiglione, reigning princes such as Francesco I, Grand Duke of Tuscany, unbosomed themselves in verse—pious, philosophic or gallant as the case might be—one realizes that as a result one is in possession of more traits and local colour than historians usually require in order to draw up a character study.

Nor have the historians missed their opportunity : and although this epoch of minor princes and great artists has been much less explored than others—our own revolutionary epoch for example—it is not only from modern research that one discovers that it is worthy of investigation. Everyone knows the works of Gregorovius, of Pastor, of Burckhardt, of Dennistoun, of Sismondi, of Baldi, of Ugolini, of Villari, of Creighton, of Perrens. Without going so far back, the studies of M. Isidoro del Lungo and of M. Guido Biagi on early Florentine women and literature, of MM. Luzio and Rénier on Isabella d'Este, on Francesco Gonzaga and Elisabetta Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino, of Saltini on Bianca Cappello and the private life of the Medici, of M. Vittorio Cian on Pietro Bembo, on Humanism and on the *Cortegiano*, of Count Pasolini on Catherine Sforza and finally of M. Malaguzzi Valeri on the Court of Ludovic the Moor, are well known and almost classic. Whatever special phase one may wish to probe into, these are authorities which must always

be consulted In French the researches of Armand Baschet into the archives of Venice and Mantua brought to light many interesting documents, used later by Ynarte and Eugène Plon, on Bianca Cappello and on the relations between Isabella d'Este and the artists of her time Certain women of the Renaissance and Italian Humanism have been studied by M Pierre de Nolhac, by M Pelissier, by Gebhart, by Klaczko, by Blaze de Bury, while M Delaborde provided a complete work, which was previously lacking, on the expedition of Charles VIII to Italy Finally, M Pierre Gauthiez has drawn portraits, which may be regarded as definitive, of Aretino, of Jean des Bandes Noires and of Lorenzaccio In English the copious and comprehensive monographs on Beatrice and Isabella d'Este and on Baldassare Castiglione by Juha Cartwright (Mrs Ady), M Opdycke's notes on the *Cortegiano* and the numerous studies by M Edward Hutton on the men and women of the Italian Renaissance, have collected, with intelligence and precision, a great many ideas which were hitherto scattered But in the ordinary way the aim of the historians has been to retrace the general course of events in Italy in the XVth and XVIth centuries, rather than to detach from those centuries the features which their masterpieces have rendered familiar to our eyes In the frescoes crowded with faces which they have drawn, important facts, great gestures and collective action distract our gaze from individual careers The aim of this book is, more modestly, to take

up the thread of these careers and to follow it back, as well as may be, through the maze of other lives, running parallel or contrary or in opposition, thereby adding to the portraits which the Masters have left us, a psychological and moral commentary which is at present lacking. After several years of investigation, I am giving here the first answers which I have been able to obtain. I bequeath these answers to those, in particular, who have had the same curiosity but have not had the same leisure in which to satisfy it. In many cases identification has been impossible.<sup>1</sup> This I have admitted, and have put forward certain solutions as hypotheses only. In others it might not have been prudent to carry the psychological portrait as far as the physiognomic details go : it was necessary to stop short at the lines of the *ensemble*. With some faces, in fact, one finds the features engraved, as it were, by the deeds, vivid colouring provided

<sup>1</sup> It may be asked, perhaps, how identification can ever be established beyond dispute in any given case to which my answer is, quite simply, by means of medals. A medal is, in fact, the one document, as it were, in which the face and the name are connected in such a way that it is impossible to argue that the one has been added to the other afterwards. When the medal is of the same period as the subject represented—which is not always the case—it is a true and final proof, one beside which texts, and even inventories, are worth very little. And one can tell whether the medal is of the same period as its model because it is stamped with a date and very often with the name of the artist as well. The words *opus pisani*, for example, or *meliolus discavit* are familiar to all those who have pored over a XVth-century medal cabinet. When, therefore, one is in possession of a notably characteristic profile, struck at the same time as the name of its model, by a contemporary artist who knew him, one can rest assured that that name certainly belongs to that particular face and one can use it as a criterion with which to identify other iconographic documents.

by the words—a clear, full model, in short. With others one has no more than an outline—the impression made on the crowd through which they have passed, in the heart of a poet, in the turn of a stanza, in the angle of a wall. But even when it is only a question of short, swift appearances, I have noted these in passing, believing as I do that in Art, as in Nature, the most fugitive effects are not the least precious.

I here present them as I have seen them—or thought I have seen them. Here are some of the most famous figures—famous either through their portraits or their lives—which used to pass along the banks of the Arno, or the Mincio or the Tiber, four hundred years ago. We will be astonished, perhaps, to find them not so very far removed from ourselves. They are very human, very feminine, some of them very “feminist”; there is nothing unexpected about them. In the construction of their masks we will not see a single feature which we cannot re-discover to-day in the faces which pass us in the street. To put it in another way, can we safely say that in our so-called modern souls there exists a taste, a pretentiousness, an obsession even, which we cannot retrace, if we so choose, amongst these long departed Lombards or Florentines?

In truth, I scarcely think so. Nature does not seem to go to the expense of providing a new type of soul in each generation, any more than she does to that of providing new noses, new eyes and new dimples. From the beginning our souls have

been essentially the same : it is only their form which has differed ; and it is circumstances which create that form. When these circumstances are general, urgent or tragic they carve and hew imperiously with everything human at their command, and a type is formed which comes to be called the type of that particular century, or dynasty or city. And this is so because this type is the most common one, and because an epoch, if it is to be recognized, must be given features. But every other type is also possible, and we shall see that the most modern of them could exist in the XVth and XVIth centuries—since they did actually exist then. Again, can we ever know what the face of our contemporary, of our neighbour, of our friend, what our own face even, which we think we know best of all, would be like if Fate were to place it in another light, illuminate it by the reflection of other objects, cast upon it the shadow of clouds which it has never known ? Many different things are required to make a human soul unfold completely. . . .

FLORENCE,

January 1913

*GIOVANNA TORNABUONI  
IN THE LOUVRE*

Portraits of Giovanna degli Albizzi, wife of Lorenzo de' Tornabuoni

Authentic Two bronze medals by Niccolo Fiorentino, in the Bargello, one, No 106, bearing these words, on the obverse "*Joanna albiza uxor Laurentii de Tornabonis*," and on the reverse the three Graces, intertwined, with the words "*Castitas—Pulchritudo—Amor*", the other, No 107, is similar on the obverse, and on the reverse shows a Diana as huntress with these words "*Virginis os habitumque gerens et virginis arma*"

Presumed portraits which bear resemblance 1st, the left profile of a woman, on wood, said to be Giovanna degli Albizzi, by Ghirlandajo, formerly in the Pandolfini Palace at Florence, now in the Pierpont Morgan collection, 2nd, the full length figure, in left profile, dressed in XVth-century gala costume, following Saint Elizabeth, in the *Visitation*, a fresco in the choir of Santa Maria Novella, by Ghirlandajo, 3rd, the terra cotta bust entitled Giovanna Tornabuoni and attributed to the school of Leonardo, in the collection of Gustave Dreyfus

A presumed portrait, in all probability, but without resemblance to the foregoing a single female figure facing a group of women and holding out a handkerchief to them, from the fresco of the Villa Lemmi, by Botticelli, now on the Escalier Daru in the Louvre.

A presumed portrait, without resemblance the Virgin in the marble bas-relief, *Virgin and Child*, formerly in the Hospital Santa Maria Nuova, and now in the Bargello, in Florence

## *GIOVANNA TORNABUONI IN THE LOUVRE*

LET US FIRST OF ALL LOOK at the portraits of some Florentines of the XVth century. There are two of them which everyone has seen or could see and it so happens that they are the faces of two of the most seductive women of their time—two contemporaries, compatriots, both of equally illustrious family, of equal youth and beauty, with careers that ran parallel—two queens of art and of Florentine hearts in the years when those hearts beat strongest and when art was at its purest, painted by the same painters, sung by the same poets, wept for by the same ardent spirits, both abruptly carried off at the height of their fame, leaving behind them on the ocean of Mankind two long furrows of regrets and tears, so that after four centuries an eddy still stirs in the hearts of the inquisitive and the ingenuous alike. They were called, in their day, *la Bella Simonetta*, or more formally, Simonetta dei Cattanei, wife of Marco de' Vespucci, and *la Bella Vanna*, or formally, Giovanna degli Albizzi, wife of Lorenzo de' Tornabuoni.

Anyone who has been to Chantilly knows the former a gay profile, with the nose tilted up, the eye alert, the forehead bare and round like that

of a bird. The mischievous curve of her profile is clearly outlined against a background of dark cloud ; at the back of her head is a huge plait of hair and pearls ; her pointed breasts are bare, and a serpent in black enamel is coiled round her splendid throat ; in the distance are trees, hills and a threatening storm. There is something light-hearted about it all, something piquant and resolute and self-assured : it is the head of a queen of fashion to whom one would not dare say : “ This is what is being worn . . . ” who dresses—or undresses—as she pleases. The picture, which is in distemper on a wooden panel, and is said to be by Pollajuolo, was painted, in all probability, between 1469 and 1476. It was acquired by the Duke d’Aumale in 1879. On the border is the inscription, *Simonetta januensis Vespuccia*. Here, indeed, is the first ray of sunshine which traversed Florence at the end of the XVth century.

The second is in the Louvre. Everyone ought to have been touched by it, but it is three-parts obscured, having been placed in one of the gloomiest spots in that necropolis—the grating of the Escalier Daru—and put under glass. Sometimes a party of wandering tourists crosses this chilly Sahara. They brush past the bare walls, the glum-looking busts and the dead stones and go away, without suspecting that they have passed by two tender and tragic careers, recalled in two masterpieces. These are the frescoes painted by Botticelli on the walls of the villa of the Tornabuoni, near Florence, to celebrate the marriage of Giovanna degli Albizzi

with Lorenzo de' Tornabuoni, in 1486 After being hidden under chalk for a long time, they were discovered in 1872 and brought here, for good or ill, in 1881 There is a scent of exile about them One pictures at once what this film of a painting would be if it were still attached to the living trunk from which it has been separated and of which it is now only the dead bark , if one could see it down there, under the Tuscan sky, in the villa Lemmi, at Pian di Mugnone, amongst the flowers, when the sun is slipping between the slopes of a curtain of cypress trees. One thinks of all that would meet one's eyes there if, before replacing it, they had regathered the sun-beams which glide over the distant hills of Fiesole, over the loggia with its delicate little columns, the iron-latticed windows, the climbing plants, the roses. Here one only knows that it exists, that it is famous—to the point of being banal but one has never really seen it.

However, on an exceptionally clear day, one is able, if one comes close, to distinguish, in spite of the varying reflections thrown off by the glass, a strange apparition resembling a coloured vapour, which might almost have floated in under these lofty arches and become fixed in places, here and there. These are the shades of graceful women with their heads turning as though on slender stems, and their faded gowns the colour of dried flowers or of young grass, they are making meaningless gestures in an unreal world A tall girl, slender and of a bearing that is almost austere,

is holding out a piece of linen as she might hold out her apron, to receive something which some other women, with sleeves like little air balloons, advancing towards her, are about to throw into it. This something is a piece of fruit, perhaps, or a flower or a lottery token. She who is receiving it does not seem very grateful. Those who are giving it do not seem very generous. Without doubt they are fairies. Only fairies would arrive thus with empty hands at a wedding. She, without doubt, is a philosopher. Only a philosopher would dress herself so simply in her marriage year and pay so little regard to what is being given her. These gifts, moreover, are not merely mediocre : they are disquieting. With her left hand one of the fairies is making that vague gesture, somehow suggesting a protest, which Botticelli puts in everywhere, but which nowhere has a definite meaning. They do not give the impression that they believe themselves to be bringing something very good to the young bride : nor does she think so either. She has a distract, absent look, as though she is prepared to receive whatever the women are throwing into her handkerchief. And what is it that they are throwing ?

They are throwing death there, a sudden, terrible death at the birth of her second child. That is their wedding present. This girl whom we see is to die in childbirth, as did the mother of her husband, Lorenzo Tornabuoni, as did, too, the first wife of her father, Maso degli Albizzi, as did, through some mysterious fatality, so many young

women of the Renaissance. In two years she will have passed away Up till then her life was to be a ray of sunshine, straight, luminous and simple, a joy for all eyes, a benefit to all it touched

Can we not picture her pacing the flagstones of the dark and ancient Florence of the XVth century, this young patrician lady, delicate, simple, charitable and learned, with her upright carriage, her measured words, her stiff folded clothes, and her slow, graceful gestures, passing through the crowd of wool and silk merchants, bankers, money changers and politicians, men who lived between the battle-field and the counting house, anxious-minded and obscure in conscience, with their lips bolted like the doors of their houses, their faces as wrinkled as their purses, but interested, none the less, in all the graces of soul and body, capable of enthusiasm for anything which might penetrate their heavy, low-lying clouds—be it woman, idea or statue?

The long, narrow, gloomy street in which she lived is still there One ventures into it as one might into a fissure in the rocks in order to pass from the centre of Florence to the outer wall surrounding the city It remains, that narrow street, as though it were an old and forgotten link in a new chain of modern or rebuilt quarters It is the former Corso di Por San Piero, nowadays the Borgo degli Albizzi, taking its modern name from the family which owned so many houses there and dwelt there so long Among the lofty, black palaces of which it consists one can see the

one in which Giovanna was born : bare, sombre, frowning walls, high perched, almond-shaped windows bearing the Albizzi coat-of-arms ; two rings of stone, the one encircling the other, and the whole sleeping under the dust of centuries. Though rebuilt and restored since the XVth century, it still strongly preserves its character. And it was here that there grew up the most famous of the eleven daughters of Maso degli Albizzi, *podesta* of Prato, gonfaloniere, Ambassador to Rome.

The house, which then was new, was not the gloomy fortress which we see to-day. The street, with buildings on one side only, received the light of day. Here and there the finest palaces gladdened it with their life. This was the liveliest and most aristocratic quarter, wherein took place the races—the *Palio*—and whence knights sallied out on their carousals. But the stones have not changed. Walking there, we can find the corner upon which there must so often have been thrown the delicate shadow of Giovanna on her way to her devotions at *San Piero Maggiore*—a church of which nothing is left and which is marked only by the remains of a XVIIth-century portico where one may still read :

DEO IN HONOREM PRINCIPE APOSTOL LUCAS DE ALBIZIS

But the portico itself has changed its function, and figures naturally enough amongst the ruins so delicately pictured by Hubert Robert. A storey has grown above it, shops have sprung up below,

and the triumphal arch of earlier days, travestied as a beast of burden, rounds off jars of milk and rolls of tobacco with the high Latin of its inscriptions and the acanthus of its capitals. One searches in vain for flagstones which might disclose Lorenzo di Credi and Luca della Robbia, formerly buried there. Everything has disappeared, and the infrequent pilgrim who comes, without losing his way, into this corner of old Florence can only be attracted thither by the airy phantom of *la Bella Vanna*.

She spent all her youth there, in dazzling glory, enlightened by intellectual joys. She was brought up to appreciate *belles-lettres* by a future Pope, Tommaseo Parentucelli. Among her admirers were Lorenzo the Magnificent and the greatest painters of the XVth century. She was affianced to the most handsome as well as the richest and most elegant stripling in Florence. To convince oneself one has only to look at his portrait in Santa Maria Novella—on the left of the fresco *Saint Joachim Driven from the Temple*. The young man is turning towards one, his right hand on his hip, his right foot forward, in an attitude of graceful impertinence. He was a great scholar, a poet taught by Politian and a learned connoisseur of antique medals. Such was Lorenzo Tornabuoni.

Their wedding was a national event. It was arranged by the King of Florence, Lorenzo the Magnificent, and took place, not in the bride's parish church, but in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Flowers, where Giovanna appeared escorted

by a hundred maidens of the noblest families, clad in white, and by fifteen young knights in full armour. The Spanish Ambassador to the Holy See was present, as were numerous Florentine and foreign nobles. The Press was represented by Politian. In place of cameras lined up at the exit from the church, the eyes of Botticelli, of Verrocchio, of Ghirlandajo, of Niccolo Fiorentino were riveted on the passing figure. For decoration there were bas-reliefs by Giotto and bronze doors by Ghiberti. The crowd, massed between Our Lady of Flowers, the Baptistry, the Campanile, the Tour des Adimari and the Bigallo, pressed against masterpieces on every side. A Guichardin and a Castellani escorted the bride to the Tornabuoni Palace. In the evening there was dancing in the Place San Michele Berteldi—now the Piazza San Gaetano—close to the palaces of the Tornabuoni which have since entirely disappeared. On the other side of the city torches were burning in their iron rings along the whole length of the Borgo degli Albizzi. All Florence was *en fête*. Never did a girl enter upon her new life with a gayer step.

Then the painters and sculptors set to work. They made haste, as if they remembered that she belonged to a short-lived family,<sup>1</sup> with which a sitting would not last long and a profile would soon be lost in the darkness which never ends. Botticelli came to the Villa Tornabuoni, nowadays

<sup>1</sup> Her eldest sister, Albiera, died at the age of sixteen, stricken by fever on the evening of her first ball. She was mourned by the whole city.





GIOVANNA TORNABUONI IN THE VISITATION

Fragment of a fresco by Ghirlandajo, in Santa Maria Novella, Florence

To face p. 33

the Villa Lemmi, whither the young couple had gone to spend the early days of their married life, and discussed mythology with Politian while he was painting on the walls the frescoes which are now in the Louvre. Niccolo Fiorentino moulded the medal which we now see at the Bargello. Ghirlandajo painted the bride at least twice on the first occasion, from the life, on the panel, long since famous, called Petrarch's Laura, which passed from the Tornabuoni family to that of the Pandolfini, and is now the property of Mr Pierpont Morgan. The second time was from memory, and was a copy of the earlier portrait, which had simply been traced on the wall with drapery added, this is in the fresco in Santa Maria Novella, in which she appears behind Saint Elizabeth in *The Visitation*.

This latter is the most famous of all the portraits of Giovanna Tornabuoni, and the best known to those who spell out her name and know nothing of her life. Every visitor to the Dominican Church notices this beautiful lady. She is sumptuously clad. Her red satin skirt is covered with gold network, held with silver buttons, and her mantle is of embroidered gold tissue. One sees her left profile as she advances, tall and erect, among the humble women of the Gospel. She seems to be taking care that no detail of her toilette should be disarranged, and she is carrying her kerchief in her hand as a lady on a round of visits might carry her card-case. Her hair is coiled flat against the back of her head in the

[former] English fashion, and from a thread round her neck hangs a cluster of pearls. . . . The whole figure stands out sharply against a background of ramparts, drawbridges, ruined triumphal arches and campaniles which vaguely resembles Florence.<sup>1</sup>

The dress is a little ostentatious, and even the least pious of visitors is almost shocked by it. But we need not imagine that such luxury seemed natural to all Giovanna's contemporaries. A few years after this fresco was painted, when its colours

<sup>1</sup> The identity of this figure has been discussed at length. A passage in Vasari gives it as a portrait, not of Giovanna Tornabuoni but of Ginevra di Benci, who died much earlier, in 1473. But on the other hand, this does not resemble the face which we have in the Louvre and, exactly behind her, there is another face which does. From which it would follow that Giovanna Tornabuoni does, in fact, appear in the Santa Maria Novella fresco, painted to the glory of the Tornabuoni, but not in the place usually assigned to her and under the conditions which we have just mentioned. As to the panel portrait of Giovanna Tornabuoni by Ghirlandajo (Pierpont Morgan collection) which is identical with the face in Santa Maria Novella, no one knows what to make of it under the above hypothesis, and so it is carefully left unmentioned.

But to end all discussion it is only necessary to take Niccolo Fiorentino's medal, bearing the inscription *Joanna albizi uxor Laurentii de Torraboris*, and to compare it with the face in Santa Maria Novella and also with the portrait in the Pierpont Morgan collection. In all three cases it is beyond question the same woman.

If, next, we take the medal with the inscription *Laurentius Tornabonis 10 fi* and compare it with the fresco on the Escalier Daru, in the Louvre, representing a young man before a tribunal of ladies, the man in each case is the same. Now this fresco, painted in honour of the young man, was beside the other, painted in honour of the young girl, in the Villa Tornabuoni, and both are the work of the same artist, executed immediately after the young man's marriage. The woman here represented, therefore, is in all probability his wife. And she is certainly Giovanna Tornabuoni in spite of the small resemblance here to the three other portraits of her which we have. There is no certainty, but no other hypothesis comes so close to the truth.

were still glowing in a way which we cannot see nowadays, Savonarola was thundering from the pulpit against these jewels and buttons and brocades. And a hundred years earlier all Florence was resounding with the magistrates' denouncements of the luxury in feminine fashions. The portrait of Giovanna, in the middle of a church and beside the Blessed Virgin, shows us how much a century of sermons and legislation, and how much the fear of eternal punishment and that of civil fines had been able to accomplish! As an example of this Franco Sacchetti gives us an account of the worries of a judge, Messer Amerighi da Pesaro, whose duty it was to attend to the administration of the sumptuary regulations. This account is well-known, but it will bear repetition while we are on the subject of the Santa Maria Novella fresco.

"My Lords," he says, addressing the *Priori*. "My Lords, I have worked all my life to learn to give sound judgment, and now, when I thought I had some knowledge, I perceive that I have none. For when I began my enquiry, according to orders received from you, into the question of the ornaments which your wives are forbidden to wear, these ladies produced in their defence arguments which I had hitherto not suspected as existing. I propose to repeat some of them to you. One lady arrived wrapped in a festooned cloak. My notary said 'Your name, please you are wearing a festooned cloak.' Whereupon the good lady pulled out the end of the festoon, which was attached to the cloak by a pin, and holding it in her hand answered, 'That! That's a garland!'

"My man then went outside and found a woman wearing a number of buttons on the front of her dress. To her he said 'You have no right to wear these buttons.'

She replied 'Excuse me, Messire, I have every right to

## *Celebrities of the Italian Renaissance*

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wear them, for they are not buttons but cupels and if you do not believe me, look for yourself · they have no stems and, moreover, there are no button holes .

"The notary then went up to another who was wearing ermine and said :

"What have you got to say in your defence ? You are wearing ermine ! " And he tried to take her name. The lady said .

"Do not put me down This is not ermine It is nursling's fur."

"And what might this nursling be ?" demanded the notary. To which the lady retorted .

"It is an animal ! "

After that we can understand the lines written by a member of the Guild of Merchants, on the margin of the Sumptuary Statutes :

If there is anyone to whom you wish ill  
Send him to Florence to be an official

But these, after all, are stories for the moralists. The artists were in no way shocked by this display of luxury. They added to it if they could. In their eyes nothing seemed too beautiful for Giovanna Tornabuoni. They affixed laudatory scrolls to her portraits, and added enthusiastic dedications.

ARS UTINAM MORES  
ANIMUMQUE EFFINGERE  
POSSES, PULCHRIOR IN TER  
IS NULLA TABELLA FORET  
MCCCCLXXXVIII

wrote Ghirlandajo on a tablet at the bottom of the portrait which is now in the Pierpont Morgan collection. Niccolo Fiorentino inscribed round his medal these words, which you can read on a

bright morning if you lean over the glass case in the second storey of the Bargello "CASTITAS—PULCHRITUDO—AMOR." Botticelli wrote nothing on the fresco which is now in the Louvre, but he painted a delicious little Cupid holding up an escutcheon. It represented the child, the first-born, who was to uphold and perpetuate the arms of the Tornabuoni.

Scarcely had these artists finished their work, perhaps even before they had finished it, when the fairies' fatal gift had done its task, Giovanna died during her second confinement, when she was only twenty years old. Thus neither age, nor neglect, nor regrets were to come to dim the image of the world reflected in those lovely, innocent, wide-open eyes.

Noble blood, beauty, a son, riches, a husband's love, wit, distinction of manner and of mind—all these made me happy, but all these the cruel Fates—to make my death more bitter—have shown me rather than given me!

Thus Politian made her complain, in the epitaph which he composed for her. Unintentionally he here explains that fresco of ours in the Louvre. "*Shown rather than given*" that is indeed the gesture of those incomprehensible figures.

The twin fresco in the Louvre is similarly hidden away. It is perhaps even more difficult to see, and is in a more gloomy place—on the other side of the door which leads to the XVIIIth-century gallery. Looking closely, however, one eventually distinguishes the profile of what might be a seminarist, a stripling with long hair, wearing

a cassock, whom a young woman, with down-cast look, is leading by the tips of her fingers towards a tribunal of women seated in a semi-circle in some sacred wood. After investigation we recognize this profile : it is the same as that which is on a medal struck, or at least inspired by, Niccolo Fiorentino, with the inscription *Laurentius Tornabonus*, and having on the reverse side a robed and armed Mercury with the words *Virginis os habitumque gerens et virginis arma*. It is certainly the same head—the pointed profile, the rather heavy cheeks, the protruding eyes, the half concave line of forehead and nose—that we see here. This, then, is the husband of Giovanna degli Albizzi, “the mirror of elegance.” This is the same youth whom one sees in the choir of Santa Maria Novella in the fresco *Saint Joachim Driven from the Temple*, and almost facing *The Visitation*, in which his young wife appears behind Saint Elizabeth.

Here he has less easy grace. He has the air of a shy young man whom a feminine protector is presenting to a committee of ladies instructed to bestow some prize. That is precisely what is happening, for the ladies represent Philosophy, Music, Astronomy, Grammar and Rhetoric. . . . They are to bestow upon him prizes for Literature, for Elegance, for taste and decorum, in the form of beautiful medals which he is collecting for Lorenzo the Magnificent ; and finally, the most coveted of all, the prize for Youth. One can scarcely see the faded outlines of the figures, but

among them are some which resemble Fates or Sorceresses. And while one is looking at this queer gathering, the light, which never lasts long on the Escalier Daru, begins to go and the walls pass into shadow. Whereupon the faces change their aspect and become sinister. Now one can only see silhouettes and their grouping is like that of judges in a court rather than like that of the Muses in a sacred wood.

As the darkness increases, memories come back to us, memories of the history of Florence under the Republic. We remember another tribunal before which this same youth appeared. The hearing took place in an ancient palace before the *Huit de la Paix*. We are now in 1497. Eleven years have passed since the young Tornabuoni had this fresco painted; nine years since he bore Giovanna to the family vault in Santa Maria Novella. Since then the city has changed hands. The Medici have been driven from Florence, and we are now in the reign of Savonarola. The brilliant "mirror of elegance," loyal to the family which arranged his marriage for him, has become implicated in a conspiracy to bring about the return of the Medici. An obscure underling, a certain Lamberto de l'Antella, has betrayed him and four other nobles with him. He is arrested and put to the torture of the cord.

Whoever is put to the torture is done for. Evidence sufficient for conviction is then available, but the sentence is discussed indefinitely. Each jurisdiction in turn declares itself incompetent.

to deal with the case. The *Huit de la Paix* send the accused back to the Court of Lords, who send them back to the *Huit*, who send them back to the Council of Eighty, who demand the institution of a *Consulte*. Italy is known to be favourably disposed towards the accused, and efforts are made to find excuses. A message is sent to ask a visionary, then much in vogue, what inspiration Heaven sends. He answers that it has been revealed to him that the aged Bernardo del Nero is to be thrown from a window. But the others? What is to be done with them?

For nine consecutive hours a hundred and eighty judges, red with anger or pale with fear, shut up in secret session in the Palais Vieux, listen to reports, talk, argue, eat—for they are not allowed to leave the room until they have wound up the debate—while far away, in a cell in San Marco, a terrible monk, a monk with a profile like that of a sheep, stirs them to action. The first verdict of the Court is a fearful one: “The ban of rebels,” but there is an appeal. It is August, the month of great heat and pests. The Palais Vieux is like a cauldron in which something infernal is brewing. After five days’ argument and delay the more violent force the others to agree to the sentence. It is to be death for the five accused, the eldest of whom, Bernardo del Nero, is seventy-three and the youngest, he whose picture we see here, is twenty-nine. It is known that Italy is tenderly inclined towards this noble head, this youthful head of a scholar and a humanist, filled

with the treasures of the Renaissance. Therefore the waverers and the inhabitants of neighbouring cities must be confronted with an accomplished fact. The execution is hurried on there is no waiting for the morrow. In torchlight the Court descends. The "Eight" satisfy themselves that the sentence will be executed. The block is ready in the courtyard of the palace adjoining the Palais Vieux. Bernardo del Nero is the first. The last to fall under the sword is Lorenzo Tornabuoni. By morning all is over. His name is inscribed in the records of deaths in his parish church of Santa Maria Novella, and is followed by the terrible announcement which appears so often at this time after the date "*Cum Sanguine*"

The whole people mourned them [says Luca Landucci in his journal]. Everyone was astonished that such a thing could have been done and could scarcely believe it. They were put to death on the same night and I was reduced to tears, for at Tornaquinci I saw the bier of the young Lorenzo passing by very shortly after his death.

Thus were extinguished, after so short-lived a splendour, the two wraiths that on clear days we see appearing on the staircase of the Louvre and which we can see any morning behind the altar of Santa Maria Novella in Florence Lorenzo and Giovanna Tornabuoni. But for the painters and sculptors their fates would have been nothing to us, and would have been hidden under the folded robe of history—the great dissembler a few strokes of the brush on a wall, the imprint of a finger on wax, redeem them for us and make them

stand out, youthful and clear-cut, in conspicuous contrast with the dim crowd of their contemporaries. Thanks to Art, these two lovely children live again and are loved.

The worship of them scarcely ever ceases. One does not often see it celebrated in the Louvre. The shadows in which their portraits are wrapped prevent the casual visitor from stopping in front of them. Their story is not well known. But at Santa Maria Novella it is another thing altogether ! The light is always good in the mornings behind the altar in the choir of the old Dominican church. At the same time that we are deciphering that face on the staircase of the Louvre on the banks of the Seine, we can be quite sure that farther south, on the banks of the Arno, there are others who are looking at it, too, and trying to penetrate its meaning. Leaning on the stalls, or upright at the choir desks, in tiers on the wooden steps, waiting for a favourable light—they see her approaching from one side, in left profile, very erect in her mantle with its heavy, straight folds, and following Saint Elizabeth, who is embracing the Blessed Virgin. Facing her on the opposite wall, amongst that group of XVth-century people in the foreground of *Saint Joachim Driven from the Temple*, they search for her young husband, Lorenzo Tornabuoni.

As soon as the service is over the long file of visitors begins to pass and to stammer pæans of admiration in every language in the world. They are as much interested in the short life of the

beautiful Giovanna as in *The Visitation*, and there is no one who is not more touched by the tragic end of Lorenzo Tornabuoni than by the misfortunes of Saint Joachim. These pilgrims from every country in Europe and from both the Americas are thus unwittingly devotees of that religion which, without ritual and without dogma, unites in one communion so many different souls—the religion of fine types of humanity.

For the rest, it matters little for what cause these fine types lived enough that they lived ardently, passionately and for things other than themselves. Our attraction for heroes is in no way measured by the philosophic trappings with which they were hampered or by means of which they sought to do battle with mankind. Savonarola ordered the "vanities" with which Giovanna adorned herself to be burnt—he had Lorenzo beheaded, or allowed him to be so. He himself was burnt in his turn. The same tourists who were just now busy paying homage to his memory in his cell in the convent of Saint Mark come hither to pay equal homage to theirs. Our piety can easily reconcile all these heroes who fought each other and proscribed each other, and who, in destroying themselves, expected to destroy human passions as well. We know that they were following an illusion. But we love them for the ardour with which they followed it.



LA BELLA SIMONETTA

Portrait attributed to Pollajuolo, Condé Museum, Chantilly

To face p 45

*LA BELLA SIMONETTA  
AT CHANTILLY*

Portraits of Simonetta dei Cattanei, the wife of Marco de' Vespucci, known as La Bella Simonetta

Authentic Profile portrait of a woman painted on wood, height 57 cm, width 42 cm, in the room called *La Tribuna* at Chantilly, attributed to Pollajuolo

Presumed portraits which bear resemblance. 1st, the figure known as *Abundance*, in one corner of *The Birth of Saint John the Baptist* in the choir of Santa Maria Novelli at Florence, attributed to Ghirlandajo, 2nd, the figure known as *Venus* in Botticelli's *Spring*, in the Academy at Florence, 3rd, the *Venus* in the picture known as *Mars and Venus* by Botticelli in the National Gallery, 4th, the *Venus* in the *Bath of Venus*, by Botticelli in the Uffizi.

Presumed portraits which do not bear resemblance 1st, the portrait of Bella Simonetta, attributed to Botticelli, in the museum at Berlin, 2nd, the profile, known as "Portrait of a Woman with a Plaited Pearl Necklace," attributed to Botticelli, in the Staedel Institute at Frankfort, 3rd, the *Bella Simonetta* in the Pitti Palace, attributed either to Botticelli or to an unknown painter, *Amico di Sandro*, 4th, the figure of *Chastity* in the *Fight between Love and Chastity* in the National Gallery, 5th, the figure of Procris in the *Death of Procris* by Piero di Cosimo in the National Gallery, 6th, the figure of the only girl whose hair is visible, shown on her knees near the *The Madonna of Pity*, in a fresco by Ghirlandajo above the altar or "chapel" of the Vespucci in the Ognissanti church in Florence.

## *LA BELLA SIMONETTA AT CHANTILLY*

A MONGST THOSE WHO NOTED Giovanna Tornabuoni's entry into the world in 1486, there were many who remembered another queen of Florentine hearts who had disappeared in the flower of her youth ten years earlier—the lady whom we can see at Chantilly in the room known as *La Tribune*—the beautiful Simonetta whom everyone knew and whom everyone mourned—Giovanna herself perhaps the very eyes which we see in paint in the fresco in the Louvre, must, when they were those of a child, have more than once stared at the profile which we now see in the little panel at Chantilly. But whereas the beautiful 'Vanna was famous because of her life and was the subject of definite portraits, the beautiful Simonetta, had she not died, might never have been suspected of living by which I mean that she might have been nothing else but a dream—the dream of a poet and a painter, a symbol of one season of the year or of one moment in human sensibility, an encounter of art and the soul which the world has only once known. Have you ever chanced to be present at some festival where the sun, the time of year, youth, some artist arriving from far off, the glimpses

of the future, friendships formed and memories shared in common, made up a harmony so rare that you had the feeling, even though you were not an expert in the theory of probabilities, that years, centuries, would pass before that set of circumstances would repeat itself? Such were the circumstances of Simonetta's appearance in the world.

It was in 1469. There was a universal rejuvenation of thought and art: statues sprang from the ground; banquets were dazzlingly magnificent; young artists were in the first enthusiasm of their youth. Botticelli was twenty-five, Ghirlandajo twenty, Verrocchio thirty-four. Printing was being tested for the first time in Italy. A new reign was beginning in Florence. Navigators were watching new worlds thrusting themselves from the depths of the seas. Archaeologists were bringing up new figures from the earth. Men's eyes took in two immense horizons—the new hemisphere and antiquity. There was peace. There was spring. There was love. And then there came a woman who seemed to bring all this in the folds of her mantle, in the golden curls of her hair, in the very gestures of her ten fingers. She was called Simonetta dei Cattanei, and she was sixteen years old. She was born at Porto Venere, near Genoa, and was a member of a great family of merchants. She had just been brought to Florence by a young Florentine, who was sixteen too, as she was, and, even as she, belonged to a great family of merchants and discoverers. He

was named Marco Vespucci.<sup>1</sup> His cousin and schoolfellow, Amerigo Vespucci, was one day to discover America. As for himself, he had only discovered Simonetta, but for a long time his discovery was of much more prodigious interest to Florence.

For it was a new world which he brought with him—it was the Renaissance typified in a woman, the nymph of antiquity who breathed and walked and spoke a language of fancy and liberty. She spoke it to all these clerks and all these churchmen, who were as yet not cleansed from their scholastic squalor and still a little bewildered by the terrors of the Middle Ages. Their souls expanded as though after a long restraint. The chains dropped from them. And on the wax of his imagination, still soft, Botticelli received the impression of an ideal which was destined never to be effaced.

It was precisely at this moment that two young brothers, scholars and poets both of them, were on the point of mounting unobtrusively upon an invisible throne and were beginning their reign. Lorenzo de Medici, called "the Magnificent," and Giuliano de Medici, who might

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to understand or even to guess why in some catalogues and official guide books at Chantilly the Louvre and Florence, written by various members of the Institute, *la Bella Simonetta* is given as the daughter of a Vespucci, who would then be a Genoese, and as married to a Cattaneo, who would then be a Florentine—wherein are many errors in a few words—nor why Giovanna degli Albizzi, who married Lorenzo Tomabuoni, is given as a Tomabuoni, who would have then married an Albizzi. Nothing can explain such a confusion of names, for there has never been the least doubt as to the identity of either the former or the latter. But as it has found its way into more than one apparently erudite monograph, it is necessary to make a note of it here.

equally well have been called "the Thinker." From the day when they first saw the girl who was known as "the Star of Genoa," the two brothers were dazzled by her and followed her with an admiration which ceased only at her death. It lasted seven years. During those seven years Simonetta presided over all the feasts which the Medici gave in their palace of Via Larga (nowadays the Riccardi Palace), in their villas at Careggi, at Fiesole and at Cafaggiuolo. Her gaiety communicated itself to everyone. Lorenzo was distracted from her by affairs of State, but Giuliano never left her. He went everywhere where she went, lost in his dream of love : a dream too well known, too public, too much sung by the poets and symbolized by the painters—and too little denounced by the women—to have been anything but platonic. The husband, Marco Vespucci, seldom made an appearance. But of what account was the husband of a symbol ?

Then came the *giostra* of 1475, one of those *fêtes* which are like a bright ray illuminating a whole generation ; a spontaneous blooming, a mirror in which a nation recognizes itself, with all its reserves of strength, of art, of wealth, of will-power—something such as was the 1889 Exhibition for the France of our day, or, for Victorian England, the Spithead Review—one of those dazzling microcosms with which eye-witnesses afterwards bore the younger generation by describing at length without being able to give any real conception of it. This *giostra*, or tourna-

ment, was given in honour of *la Bella Simonetta* on the anniversary of her baptism, 28 January, 1475. In the gloomy Place Santa Croce, the name of which recalls little else but tombs to the minds of modern tourists, Giuliano de Medici was seen advancing into the lists bearing a banner on which was a picture of Simonetta as a helmeted Pallas Athene beneath the picture were the words in French "*La Sans Pareille*". And he, naturally enough, was the winner, for the Florentines were experts at organizing a *fête*. Simonetta crowned him with her own hands, amidst the applause of a whole people—a people mounted on the steps of the old Franciscan church and on wooden galleries, and pressed into overhanging balconies gay with long, brightly-coloured mats. The whole of Florence proudly saw itself mirrored in this couple, these perfect types of humanity which its effort towards the Beautiful had produced.

From this moment the platonic love of the two heroes could grow no greater and could only be satisfied when death came. The fates which had so carefully arranged these two lives did not fail them in the end. A year later, on 26 April 1476, Simonetta died of phthisis. Two years later, to the very day, on 26 April 1478, Giuliano was struck down by the followers of the Pazzi, in the choir of Our Lady of Flowers.<sup>1</sup> The two lovers

<sup>1</sup> This date, 26–27th April, seems a fated one in the history of Florence. It was on the night 26–27 April, 1476 that *la Bella Simonetta* died. It was on 26 April, 1478 that the rebellion of the Pazzi took place. On 26 April, 1527 occurred the last serious uprising against the Medici. And it is from 27 April, 1859 that we date the Italian Revolution and the beginning of real nationality.

entered into history, as Lorenzo and Giovanna Tornabuoni were destined to enter later—by the narrow gate reserved for those beloved of the gods.

The arrival from Genoa, the devotion of a young prince himself destined for a tragic end, the *giostra*, the triumph : that is all we know of *la Bella Simonetta*. The rest is only paintings and psychology. But what paintings ! Botticelli's type caught for all time, refined, idealized ; the type represented in his *Spring* and in his *Birth of Venus*—the latter being, if one chooses to think so, her arrival from Genoa, the former her triumph at the spring festival. . . . And what psychology ! The psychology of one born to be a queen, that is, of a woman who had the essential quality of a queen : to be a light for all and a shadow for none, to attract all men's hearts and yet to make no woman jealous, to give everyone the impression that she saw none but he, and yet to let no one feel forgotten ; to possess a beauty such that her triumph in the tournament was a public joy and her death in the prime of youth an occasion for national mourning ; to be wept for by all—save perhaps her husband, who remarried soon afterwards—leaving an impression so deep in all hearts that thirty-four years after her death, her painter, Botticelli, still faithful to her, asked to be buried at her feet.<sup>1</sup> . . .

. Amongst other excellent gifts [wrote Politian] her manners were so gentle and so attractive that even those who were

<sup>1</sup> In the church of the Ognissanti, before the altar (or chapel) of the Vespucci

not particularly intimate with her or to whom she gave but small attention, believed themselves to be the unique objects of her affection. Yet no woman was really jealous of her, and all of them praised her without restraint. And it seems an extraordinary thing that so many men could love her to distraction, without exciting jealousy.

Such is the evidence of those who wrote about her.

Now for the diagnosis of those who painted her. Let us pause before the portrait at Chantilly when the light is good, that is to say, towards the end of the afternoon, when the shadows are beginning to lengthen on the lawns and when the hounds, at exercise, move noiselessly over the short grass. Observe the profile, standing out against a green and violet mist, the upturned nose which sniffs the foliage, the mouth which tastes the air, the long neck, upright as the stem of a flower, seeming to point to heaven. Let us discard what does not belong to the woman herself, but only to the period and its fashion—the tresses and the jewels behind them, looking almost like a battle of serpents in chains of pearls, the rubies which droop like cherries, the "*brocchetta da testa*," fixed at the top of her head like a lightning-conductor, the very apotheosis of fantasy. What is the decisive feature in this physiognomy, the "mark of dissimilarity" which distinguishes it from a hundred other portraits of the same period? It is her expression, with the eyelid raised a shade too much and the eye itself fixed on a point just a little above the horizontal, it is her look, which is directed at our foreheads instead of into our

eyes : it is this, combined with a smiling mouth, which always gives a face a suggestion of astonishment.

Hence the "extraordinary thing" which surprised Politian is explained. For the secret of popular sympathy is very simple : we love those who love life ; we love the woman who says to us, "See how beautiful life is !" and proves it to us by being beautiful herself ; who, moreover, admires other women because she enjoys being astonished ; who, endlessly marvelling and delighted, discovers colours, sounds, rhythms, inspirations, scents, gestures and minds, as if she were seeing them for the first time, and in doing so renews their freshness for us ; who propagates infectious enthusiasm amongst us, bored and weary though we may be, and wins us over to the sacred cause of Life—the opposite, in short, of the "fatal woman" who is only loved by one or by a few and to their detriment, the "providential" woman who is loved by all and for their benefit.

It is different, this, from vice and different, too, from virtue. It is independent of both the one and the other. It responds to a feeling quite other than either admiration or desire : it responds to the need for believing in the beauty of the world, in spite of all the reasons that there may be for doubting its existence. Pessimists are often heroes and sometimes saints. They can be practical and material benefactors of humanity. But only the optimists are popular, and only they are universally loved. And from the popularity of a human

being, when such is witnessed to by history, we can boldly conclude that he or she was an optimist.

Thus Simonetta appears to us a person surprised and delighted at finding herself on earth, happy in the happiness of others, organizer of their pleasures, inspirer of fetes and images and works of art by the wonder which she expressed in it all, rejoicing to the full in life, in the swift-moving life which perhaps she felt to be escaping her, piling up sensations, ideas, memories in the narrow frame of her career, as one heaps precious things in a chest just before one starts on a journey, receptive in the highest degree, hurrying to see everything in this world before leaving it.

It is enough to look at the portraits that were painted in her likeness at this date to guess that death was near. We know of no authentic portraits except the one at Chantilly, but we know that Botticelli painted no one but her. His Madonnas, his Venuses, his allegories—all were taken from her. That face with the pointed chin, the prominent cheekbones, the eyes wide open with fever, of which Taine said "She promises us Infinity, and she herself is not certain of living" is hers. She is that sick Venus whom we see in the middle of the *Spring*, wrapping herself in a cloak so as not to catch cold, amongst the Grates clad in gauze and crystal. Painters are often prophets. A portrait is a diagnosis. How many times must the artist, during the long hours of his sittings, have watched his model and seen the approach of that which neither family

nor friends yet suspected ! How many times he must have said to himself, as he achieved her likeness : " She is not long for this world ! "

In April 1476 the wasting away of this ardent nature became apparent to all. An intermittent fever came on and phthisis was suspected. The Vespucci, seized with panic, took the invalid away to what was the great purifier of those days, the sea, and installed her at Piombino, facing the isle of Elba, where Giuliano de Medici had undergone a cure and been healed of a wound. Her mother hurried over from Genoa. The two Medici, kept away by affairs of State, one at Florence, the other at Pisa, sent daily couriers to bring news of the phases of her illness or of any rays of hope that there might be. The letters which they received from Simonetta's brother-in-law, Piero Vespucci, are still extant, and these show the position which the nymph held in the lives of everyone. On 18 April 1476 he wrote :

Simonetta is in much the same condition as when you left her, but is perhaps a little better. We are obeying the instructions both of Maître Stefano and of the other doctors with diligence and we will act as quickly as possible . . .

On the 20th April :

By the help of God and thanks to the skill of Maître Stefano, Simonetta has improved considerably. There is less fever and weakness, less difficulty in breathing, and she eats and sleeps better. According to the doctors her illness will last a long time and there are but few remedies except taking good care of her. And seeing that this progress is largely due to you, we all, including her mother, who is at Piombino, send you our heartfelt thanks .

Six days later

I wrote a few days ago to tell you of the improvement in Simonetta's condition—unfortunately it has not been maintained as I expected and as we all hoped. This evening Maitre Stefano and Maitre Moyse held a consultation on the question of what medicine to give her—they decided that she must take it and saw that she did. We cannot say what good it will do but may God grant us our wishes for her! The doctors are not in agreement on the cause of her illness. Maitre Stefano has declared that it is neither a hectic fever nor consumption, but Maitre Moyse contradicts him.

At last, two days later, Lorenzo the Magnificent, who was at Pisa, received the expected news—"The blessed soul of Simonetta has gone to Paradise," one of his intimates wrote to him.

Indeed, one might say that this was a second Triumph—over Death this time—for, truly, if you had seen her as she lay dead you would have found her as beautiful and as gracious as when she was alive. *Requiescat in pace!*

Thus began the first act of a worship which was destined never to end. On receipt of the news Lorenzo went out into the calm spring night to stroll about with a friend, and while they were discussing her death he suddenly stopped short to look at a star which had never before seemed to him so brilliant.

"See!" he exclaimed. "There is the soul of that delightful woman! Either she has changed into this new star or she has joined herself to it."

And on another evening of the same spring, while he was passing through the gardens of one of his villas, he noticed a sunflower which "in the evening

keeps its face turned towards the west, which has robbed it of its vision of the sun until, in the morning, the sun reappears in the east. . . ." And he saw in that an "image of our fate when we lose someone whom we love: we remain with all our thoughts turned towards the last impression which we had of the vision now lost to us. . . ."¹

It is a curious thing, but this impression has lasted until to-day. Simonetta, who died four and a half centuries ago, bewitches the critics, infatuates the historians, and gives a semblance of imagination even to those accustomed to the deciphering of old manuscripts. . . . People seem to see her appearing and disappearing in the old frames of the portraits, like a beloved face at every window, or between the trunks of the trees in a forest or in every corner of a fresco, in the angles of every chapel, shrouded by the smoke of the candles, in every obscure recess, half hidden by the plaster of the ancient city of lilies, and in every museum in the world! . . . Every time they see a Botticelli of which they do not know the name they

¹ Politian's verses are too lovely and too little known to be omitted at the moment when we are taking leave of la Bella Simonetta

Dum pulcra effertur Simonetta seretro  
Blandus et examini spirat in ore lepos  
Nactus Amor tempus quo non sibi turba cavaret,  
Iecit ab occlusis mille faces oculis.  
Mille animos cepit viventis imagine risus  
Ac morti insultans —Est mea, dixit, adhuc,  
Est mea, dixit, adhuc nondum totam eripis illam.  
Illa vel examinis militat ecce mihi—  
Dixit et ingemuit neque enim satis apta triumphis  
Illa puer vidit tempora sed lacrymis

declare "It is she! It is la Bella Simonetta!" They think they see her, now presiding over the Dance of the Graces and at the distribution of roses, now upright and nude on a scallop pushed by chubby zephyrs towards the river bank where a nymph is waiting to reclothe her in a flowered wrap which flutters in the wind, now raising a finger to Heaven, calling the gods to witness the injustice meted out to the unfortunate Apelles whom the Furies are dragging along by the hair Standing before the *Spring* they say

"That is she with the flowers in her mouth"

"No, it's the one fully dressed and bestowing a blessing, with a sad expression as though she were already suffering from her last illness."

"No, it's the one in the flowered robe, coming forward scattering roses!"

And in the end a critic always appears and says

"You are all of you wrong. It is absurd to attribute any one of the figures to her. Identification is impossible. La Bella Simonetta is lost for ever, and you will never see her again."

But for an instant those people were happy

And a moment afterwards they begin again  
In the National Gallery they try to decipher a  
curious game which is being played in a dell by  
a girl dressed as if for tennis on a lawn strewn  
with broken arrows and flowers in full bloom  
With a shield embossed like the shell of a tortoise  
held in her left hand, she is warding off the shafts  
of a handsome Cupid with slim legs and sinewy  
arms, while her right hand is raised to throw over

him, like a lasso, a kind of chaplet. Once again they are saying :

“ It is she. It is *Chastity*, with Simonetta’s features, struggling with *Love*, with the features of Giuliano de Medici. . . . ”

In an adjoining room, in front of a recumbent Venus watching over a sleeping Mars teased by fauns who are blowing through a shell into his ears, devotees of Simonetta are whispering : “ Might not that be she ? ”

They think they see her in the Pitti, in the Uffizi, in Frankfort, in Berlin, for “ the wish is father to the thought.” The hallucination is so strong that people have gone so far as to recognize her in a long equine face with a neck like a giraffe and fillets “ à la Botticelli,” which is in the Pitti—the exact antithesis of our face at Chantilly. Finally, in the church of the Ognissanti in Florence, when the sacristan, carefully handling his rod, raises the red covering which conceals Ghirlandajo’s fresco called *The Madonna of Pity*, in front of the altar of the Vespucci, they ask the name of the girl with the bare forehead facing the young Amerigo Vespucci ? Is it not his cousin ? Is it not Simonetta ? There she is ! There she is ! It is she ! . . . Thus, though dead for four hundred and fifty years, she is still amongst us, living the many-sided and uncertain life of a ghost. ‘

The most beautiful portrait of all, as everyone knows, is at the Academy in Florence, in the Place Saint-Marc. The whole of Europe has passed before the *Spring*, hundreds of persons have



PLATE IV.



SPRING

By Botticelli, in the Academy, Florence. The central figure is presumed to be a portrait of La Bella Simonetta.  
To face p. 61

copied it, but no one has ever understood it. The innumerable commentaries which have been made upon it have not explained it. Go back and look at it again, ten years, twenty years, after you saw it for the first time. Enter that dark and gloomy building, the Academy, make your way between unfinished marbles by Michael Angelo, which seem like an exhibition by a super-Rodin, and pause in front of Botticelli's riddle. Always it will surpass the memory which you had of it! She is as absurd as ever, gratuitously absurd, hopelessly, inexcusably, endlessly absurd. She comes straight at you, clad in that ridiculous dress on which are stuck bunches of flowers exactly like those on the ground, and which is embroidered with a fringe of paper lace protruding in the wrong direction. Her neck is encircled with a prize wreath which is too big for her, and her sleeves look as though they were made of fish scales. She is scattering flowers which she seems to be pulling from the embroidery of her dress, scattering them in abundance on a lawn which has no need of them seeing that it is already so covered with flowers that there is no space for one's feet between them. And yet, as light as though she had wings, she is delightful.

<sup>1</sup> It is generally admitted that the figure of *Flores* in Botticelli's *Spring* and the whole grouping of the picture inspired the following verses by Politian in which Simonetta is definitely indicated.

Candida è ella, e candida la veste,  
Ma pur di rose e fior dipinta et d'erba  
Lo manellato crm dell' aurea testa  
Scando in la fronte umilmente superba,  
Ridegli attorno tutta la foresta

## *Celebrities of the Italian Renaissance*

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Beside her a pregnant girl with a straw in her mouth is turning round in her flight from a figure that looks like that of a drowned man, green and swollen, emerging from a tree and trying to blow on her neck. And the wind is beating on her hair as on flames. . . . Farther away, the tall and naked bodies of three fair-haired consumptives are at full upward stretch beneath the gossamer stuff which clothes them, dancing in such a way that they touch earth only with their toes and each other in air by the tips of their fingers. A youth, with his back turned on them, is knocking down oranges with a stick. Who is it? From the dirk hanging at his side and his semi-military bearing, we suspect that he is the guardian of the place. But it seems that this youth is Mercury,

Ell' era assisa sopra la verdura  
Allegra, e ghirlandetta avea contesta  
Di quanti fior creasse mai natura,  
De' quali era dipinta la sua vesta  
Poi con la bianca man ripreso il lembo,  
Levassi in pié con di fior pieno un grembo

Al regno ove ogni Grazia si diletta,  
Ove Belta di fiori al crin fa brolo,  
Ove tutto lascivo drieto a Flora  
Zefiro vola e la verde erba infiora

Ivi non osa entrar ghiacciato verno,  
Non vento e l'erbe o gli arbuscelli stanca.  
Iri non volgon gli anni lor quaderno,  
Ma lieta PRIMAVERA mai non manca  
Ch' e suoi crin biondi e crespi all' aura spiega  
E mille fiori in ghirlandetta lega

(*Stanze di Poliziano per la giostra del magnifico Giuliano di Piero de Medici, libro primo*)

that his stick is his wand and that he is dispersing the clouds It is quite possible, for anything in this amazing affair is possible and nothing probable. But it is also said that this is Giuliano de Medici—in a queer garb for the future father of a Pope! Finally, in the middle of this group of semi-nude figures, a sad-faced, delicate woman, weighed down by a heavy cloak, her head standing out sharply against a black bush, is making a gesture so vague that one cannot say whether she is blessing or protesting And above there bulges the little body of a Cupid who is shooting an arrow at random, for his eyes are bandaged and he is about to miss everyone.

We cannot but be moved—moved by the grace of this fantasy—and we will ask from it nothing more than the entirely sensuous joy which it has given the world for four hundred and thirty years. We will not load these airy figures with the heavy queries of the commentators For in any case Botticelli defies analysis Did he intend to paint this? Did he mean that? Are the faces portraits? Are the portraits allegories? Are the allegories illustrations for a poet? Perhaps yes, perhaps no Perhaps both yes and no at once? Scholars are very exacting people for them things must be logical, but poor artists such as Botticelli are content to give us things which are beautiful

He could have created this figure of *Spring* in a thousand different ways He could have begun with an allegory and ended with a portrait. He

could have made a study of a model and then transformed the portrait into an allegory. He could simply have reproduced a *fête*, a costume ball given by Simonetta. . . . Watteau, watching the scenes of an Italian comedy, and then inventing a fairy world of his own, was possibly not without a predecessor. . . . Who can say what passes through the mind of an artist in the mystery of creation and composition? What strange abuse of words, what unheard-of presumption there is in the mere term "identification," when the author himself would be hard put to it to indicate the starting point of what he saw and what he dreamed, of what he achieved without intention, of what he intended without achieving, of what he wished for, of what he avoided, of what he underwent! If he were there, and if we were to press him with the questions which are asked about his work, perhaps, with hands raised to Heaven, he would exclaim: "And how should I know?"

In actual fact, of all these portraits, real or supposed, and of all these faces which scholars vie with each other in identifying, there is only one which has the same lines as our profile at Chantilly, and that one is not a masterpiece.

It is the figure of *Abundance* in the right-hand corner of Saint Elizabeth's room in Santa Maria Novella. This figure is unfortunately badly drawn, and unworthy of Ghirlandajo. It is scarcely original, even. It is a repetition, in profile, of an identical figure by Pollajuolo that one can see

in the Dôme Museum on one side of the *Palotto d'argento*. But what memories it evokes! She is arriving like a whirlwind in Elizabeth's room, bearing on her head a plate piled high with fruits as though it were a monumental hat made out of a tart of grapes and half-ripe pomegranates, flowing behind her is a scarf of Liberty which the wind fills and shapes into a basket handle, two flasks bound with cords are swinging from her left arm, her figure is cut in two by a wide-puffed fold, she is dressed in the Greek fashion and in bright colours. At the pace at which she is moving she will have crossed the whole fresco before the beautiful but precise lady who is preceding her has reached the bedside of the woman in childbirth!

If this is not Simonetta it is a symbol of her. It was thus that she swept across life. The arrival of this mad, unconventional, prophetic allegory on the solemn domestic scene as played by the good ladies of Florence in the XVth century is the arrival of the Renaissance itself. All the other figures are real, they are wearing the costume of the period and are making the proper gestures—collected, practical—that of the servant, for instance, who is bringing refreshment to her mistress, of the wet-nurse who is suckling the baby, of the maid who is holding out her arms to take it, of the formal lady visitor who is proffering congratulations. With fatuous exuberance Simonetta is bursting in on all this in fancy costume—an incomprehensible thing to do. She jars, she startles, she rejuvenates

## *Celebrities of the Italian Renaissance*

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One feels that her arrival is about to upset everyone in the room, and that she is letting in a breath of fresh air which will make both scarves and ideas flutter. Henceforth we understand why she was so beloved. She marked the return of fantasy into the world.

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THE MURALS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST  
Fresco by Ghirlandajo, in Santa Maria Novella, Florence. The figure on the bed is presumed to be a portrait of  
Lucrezia de' Medici  
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*LUCREZIA DE MEDICI  
AT SANTA MARIA NOVELLA*

Portraits of Camilla Lucrezia Tornabuoni, wife of Piero de Medici, called Peter the Gouty

Authentic, but done long after the death of the model on the basis of unreliable documents The medal of Lucrezia Tornabuoni, left profile, the head covered with a veil, with the inscription *Lucretia Tornaboni Petri. Med Uxor.* On the reverse, a crown of laurels, with the inscription *Dulce Decus*

Presumed portrait with grounds for the assumption . the Saint Elizabeth in Ghirlandajo's frescoes in the choir of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, notably Saint Elizabeth, in bed, in the *Birth of John the Baptist*

Presumed portraits without grounds for the assumption · the portrait of an *Unknown Woman*, full face, by Verrocchio in the Lichtenstein gallery in Vienna and the portrait of a woman with a necklace of pearls, by Botticelli, in the Staedel Institute at Frankfort.

*LUCREZIA DE MEDICI  
AT SANTA MARIA NOVELLA*

WE MUST NOT LEAVE the choir of Santa Maria Novella without noticing for whose sake and towards whom Simonetta is hurrying, that is to say, the Saint Elizabeth seated on her bed, wearing a white veil, in a room in a XVth-century palace. For here is a third female face very typical of the Florentines of that period. This lady in the prime of life is none other than the mother of Simonetta's two platonic lovers—Lorenzo and Giuliano de Medici—it is Lucrezia Tornabuoni, wife of Piero de Medici, or Peter the Gouty. To find her here, changed into Saint Elizabeth, should not surprise us. Just as the history of the Florentine Republic was simply the history of a few great families—the Albizzi, the Tornabuoni, the Bardı, the Medici, the Vespucci, the Pazzi, the Acciajuoli—projected on a background of democracy and rebellion, so Scriptural history, in Florence, was only the history of the same families projected against a Scriptural background. The round of visits paid by Giovanna Tornabuoni, in her finest array, was finished off in following Saint Elizabeth when the latter went to see the Blessed Virgin Lorenzo de Medici (at the Palais Riccardi) going

for a ride, finds himself, one cannot say how, in the cortège of the three Magi. And Lorenzo Tornabuoni, going to church, is a witness, though perhaps not in the least an interested one, of the insults offered to Saint Joachim. These ladies and gentlemen are surrounded by Saints, Apostles and Prophets, whom they would gladly receive in their palaces as celestial guests ; but one feels, from the powerful characterization of their features and the brilliance of their costumes, that the real subjects of the pictures are they themselves, who are paying for them. They are the patrons.

Now in this case the patron is Giovanni Tornabuoni, that is to say, the head of the Medici bank in Rome, the Treasurer of Sextus IV, the lettered and artistic financier of the XVth century. It was he who placed an order for the decoration of the choir of Santa Maria Novella with Ghirlandajo, and Ghirlandajo was at work on it for four years—from 1486 to 1490. The real subject of the fresco, then, was the Tornabuoni family. They took the foremost places. In it one finds first Giovanni Tornabuoni, then his wife (on the right and on the left of the window respectively), then his son, Lorenzo Tornabuoni, then his son's wife, la bella Giovanna. Naturally enough one also finds his sister Lucrezia, married to Piero de Medici, or Peter the Gouty. And it is natural to find her as Saint Elizabeth, because this pious and cultured woman had dedicated her son to Saint John the Baptist, patron saint of Florence, and

because she had translated the life of the saint into  
*ottava rima*

She is seen here on one of the chief fashionable occasions in the life of an Italian woman of the XVth century as a newly-made mother she is receiving visitors If one closely observes her expression at this moment when the servant is handing her refreshments on a plate and when the visitors, in their best clothes and laden with congratulations and pearls, are approaching, one recognizes the woman who is depicted for us in the letters of Lucrezia de Medici It might be some other matron Alessandra Macinghi, for instance, or Isabella Sacchetti Guicciardini, but it is undoubtedly a matron of this particular period And everything tends to make us think that we are in the presence of the most notable of them all, of her who was known as 'the queen of Florence'

A daughter-in-law of old Cosmo, mother of Lorenzo the Magnificent and of Giuliano the Assassinated, grandmother of two Popes, Lucrezia de Medici takes her place in the history of Florence, as does Laetitia Ramolino<sup>1</sup> in her box in David's *Coronation*—watchful, powerful and self-effacing It would be interesting to make a study of the mothers of great men I think that one would find one trait common to all of them, and that trait would be an unfailing constancy Unfortunately history is more concerned with the children

<sup>1</sup> Laetitia Ramolino was the mother of Napoleon I—Translator's Note.

of great men than with their parents, and thus the causes of family degeneration are much better known to us than the causes of psychological and moral improvement. But an exception must be made in the case of Italy in the XVth and XVIth centuries. There it often happens that the ray of light which illuminates the great frescoes of history falls also on the corner where stand the mothers of celebrated men, those tragic, dauntless widows who collected and put together again the pieces of broken fortunes. We are often in possession of their portraits, their letters to their children, their accounts with their farmers, their inventories, a thousand little insignificant details which, when once assembled, shape themselves into a human reality. In Florence and its neighbourhood one would find many women who displayed this characteristic of constancy with a harshness that was sometimes savage: Isabella Sacchetti Guicciardini, mother of the ambassador, Alessandra Macinghi, mother of Filippo Strozzi, Luigia de Gonzaga, mother of Baldassare Castiglione, Maria Salviati, mother of Cosmo I, or again, Catherine Sforza, mother of that "Jean des Bandes Noires," whose medal, by San Gallo, strongly recalls the profile of Napoleon. But the most representative of all is this austere woman whom we see here, seated on her bed, receiving her visitors and controlling everyone with her look.

She was a Tornabuoni. When quite young she married the son of Cosmo, the "Father of his

Country" Her father-in-law was a determined old man, and not without genuine ability, but her husband was a mere invalid hardly capable of wanting anything and, when he did want it, of taking action to get it. Would this husband be capable of succeeding his father in the government of Florence, and would he bequeath supreme power to his son? If there had been only this invalid to hand on the sceptre from the dying old man to his grandchildren, who were still in the nursery, the history of the Medici would have ended, and even the history of France might have been changed. But there was also this woman. There was Lucrezia de Medici. For sixteen years she occupied the extraordinary position of a Regent in a Republic. As the wife of a kind of President, the *capo della repubblica*, who was always vacillating, and as the mother of two candidates for the Presidency, she preserved a kind of Interregnum. From the death of old Cosmo until the coming of age of her son Lorenzo, hers were the strong hands which retained power. Her husband reigned but she governed, and at her husband's death, on the night following his obsequies, when the heads of the city decided to hand power over to her son, it was only because she was beside them.

"She is the man of the family," said the aged Cosmo. She was all that, but without fuss or ostentation, with no official title, scarcely visible, and—as in this fresco itself—always in the middle distance.

It is easy for a woman to keep in this middle

distance during the great crises and struggles of history : many a time has a queen descended the steps of a throne with dignity. But it is much less easy to solve the problem when it is a question of the lesser domestic tableaux, of scenes of the kind which make up what is called "family life." It was in that that Lucrezia de Medici displayed her admirable modesty. She advised her husband, she attracted clients to the Medici cause, she chose a wife for her son , but in all these household manœuvres she remained as deferential to the head of the family as she was vigorous and decisive in her own actions. We have letters of hers which re-create for us the physiognomy observed in Santa Maria Novella without the alteration of a single feature. Read what she wrote from Rome to her husband in March 1467 :

On Thursday morning as I was going to St. Peter's I met Madame Madeleine Orsini, the cardinal's sister, who had with her her daughter, aged fifteen or sixteen. The latter was dressed in the Roman fashion with a large white veil, a *lenzuolo*, and in this attire she seemed to me very beautiful, fair and tall , but as she was quite hidden by the veil I was unable to take her in at my ease. It so happened that yesterday I went to visit the said Monseigneur Orsini , he was in the house of the above-mentioned sister, which communicates with his own. When, on your behalf, I had paid the visit due to His Holiness, his sister and her daughter, the latter in a tightly-laced dress of the kind worn in Rome and without her *lenzuolo*, came in. We discoursed for a long time and I had a good chance to examine the girl. As I have already said, she has a nice figure, she is fair skinned and her manners are good, though not so pleasing as those of our own girls. But she is very modest and would be easy to mould into our usages and customs. She is not a blonde—there are no blondes here—but her hair, of which she has plenty, is inclined

to be red. Her face is rather round, but it did not displease me. Her neck is agreeably long, but seems to me a little thin, or, shall we say, slender. We could not see her bosom as it is customary here to hide it, but it seemed to me well made. She does not carry her head high as our girls do but a little inclined forward, which I attribute to her shyness. I see no fault in her except her air of embarrassment. Her hands are long and well-shaped and, taking her all in all, we would regard her as above the average, although she could not be compared with our Maria or our Lucrezia or our Bianca. Lorenzo saw her too and you will be able to hear for yourself whether he was pleased with her. I am confident that whatever you and he decide to do will be for the best and I will support you in it. May God show us the right course to take !

YOUR LUCREZIA

When this "shy" girl, who was to be easily moulded to the usages and customs of the Medici, was duly married, with great ceremony, she raised her head and displayed the strong-willed, arrogant and stubborn profile which we see on Bertoldo's medal, but her mother-in-law, by a prodigious exercise of wisdom and will-power, was able to fade into the middle distance. From far off she continued to rule her family, but in the same way as she was able to rule Florence—without showing herself.

Even when at a distance, and even when ill, she followed the smallest details of her son's household, and it is curious to catch a glimpse of this woman statesman who knew how to disarm rivals within the family by making them ambassadors, in her rôle of good housewife and attentive mother. She was at Bagno al Morba, whither she had gone to take the waters, when she heard that Lorenzo

the Magnificent was going to receive the Duchess of Ferrara, en route for Rome, at Pisa. She had vague fears that he would not have enough wine, and so she wrote to him thus :

*Salutem* I am sending you sixteen flasks of good old Greek wine eight of Poggibonsi, marked in ink and eight of Colle To us they seem good but you must choose for yourself. And four *Torte Basse* (cakes made at Sienna) I am doing this because I think that with the arrival of *Madama* (the Duchess of Ferrara, passing through Pisa) you may have need of them, although I do not doubt that you have made provision However, as I had these things by me and as they seemed good I am sending them in the hope that you will be pleased with them Do not let the carrier return here empty Oranges, biscuits and *marino* (fish ?) would be welcome Nothing more for the moment. I am going along well and I expect great results from the baths God be praised and may He protect you !

In haste, this 23rd day of May, 1477

Your LUCREZIA DE' MEDICI,  
at Bagno a Morba

When her son Giuliano, over whom she had watched so carefully, fell mortally wounded in the choir of *Our Lady of Flowers* on 26 April 1478, she did not regard her duty to him as being ended. She sought out the natural son whom he had left and took care of that love-child, who was destined eventually to become Pope Clement VII. And since, besides that, she brought up her grandson Giovanni, Lorenzo's son, who later on became Leo X, she actually dandled two future Popes on her knees. . . . The tragedy of the Pazzi caused her not one moment of despair. She never recoiled from a duty, but dried her tears and went back to her task, transferring her broken

hopes to the new generation and keeping her eyes fixed on the future of her family rather than on its past, even while she mourned for her murdered son before the altar erected to his memory in Santa Maria Novella. She reappeared at the bedside of her daughter-in-law when the latter was dangerously ill and presided over her lying-in. She was everywhere where her presence was considered necessary, and nowhere where she might have been thought in the way. She prayed and she acted, worthy in every way of what that great statesman, Lorenzo de Medici, said of her at her death "I have lost not only my mother, but my sole refuge in my many troubles and my comfort in much of my work."

Is it indeed she whom we see here, a little above Giovanna, who married her nephew, Lorenzo Tornabuoni, and quite close to la Bella Simonetta, whom her son loved? Was it her likeness that Ghirlandajo chose when he painted that Saint Elizabeth, of whom she must have thought so often when she was writing her Life of Saint John the Baptist? There is nothing to prove it, but everything to make us think so. In this fresco, ordered by her brother, the Tornabuoni banker, and painted to the glory of the Tornabuoni, she occupies just the place which her rôle in the great family assigns to her. There is not one trait of her moral physiognomy which does not exactly correspond to this portrait. We may believe, then, that we are in the presence of "the Queen of Florence." And while the evening shadows

are closing in on the choir of Santa Maria Novella we can carry away with us, united in our memory, as they seem to be in this fresco, visions of these three. Simonetta Vespucci, Giovanna Tornabuoni and Lucrezia de Medici—that is to say, the stranger whom the Florentines saw come amongst them as the symbol of the Renaissance, and the two women of Florence whom the white beans which fall into the baptistery box are for ever announcing to the world to have been the purest of the pure.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "All baptisms took place at the Baptistry of San Giovanni, and for every male child baptized here the priest put a black bean in a box kept for the purpose, and a *white bean* for every female, and in this way they kept count of all the births which occurred in the entire district."

(Guido Biagi, librarian of the Laurentian and Riccardi Libraries, Florence *Men and Manners of Old Florence*)





TULLIA D'ARAGON

Supposed portrait By Moretto, in the Martinengo Gallery, Brescia

To face p 79

*TULLIA D'ARAGON  
AT BRESCIA*

Presumed portrait of Tullia d'Aragon the half-length and half life-size portrait of a woman, seen three-quarter face, holding a sceptre and leaning on a stone on which is inscribed *Quae sacru  
soannis caput saltando obtinuit*, by Alessandro Bonvicino, known as *le Moretto*, in the Martinengo gallery at Brescia Cf the fine study of M Guido Biagi, *Un' etèra romana*, Florence, 1897, and reproduced in his work *Men and Manners of Old Florence*, London, 1909

## *TULLIA D'ARAGON AT BRESCIA*

WANDERING IN the dead streets of Brescia one will eventually come out into a little deserted square, antiquated and musty, in which a large bronze statue of an artist with a square cap on his head and his palette in his hand announces that the town has a special pride in some celebrated master of the brush. The statue is of Bonvicino, known as le Moretto. He seems to have been for ages the sole inhabitant of this square, where the grass is pushing its way between the paving stones and where the hours seem to pass more slowly than elsewhere and the shadows to lengthen less swiftly. There are, in the square, yellow irises at which no one looks, a fountain at which no one drinks, a church where no one prays, and a museum which no one visits. One enters the latter, however, when one is a passer-by and a stranger weary of the things which too many other people have looked at. It is a massive palace, listless-looking, deserted, silent, with a ruined and decrepit appearance, one of those Italian palaces once built for large, exuberant families and remaining the same when the families had been reduced and their lives shrivelled up. It was bequeathed to the town by its last owner,

Count Martinengo, together with a collection of pictures which it contained, the majority of them by Moretto and not all of them are masterpieces. There are also some modern paintings which are execrable.

To the above there has been added a collection left by Count Tosio who used to live in the same part of the town. One can imagine the pious wish of the nobleman, who only occupied a corner of his old house, that it should be filled with glorious memories of the city's happier days, and one realizes, then, that this was a deed of civic piety, and resigns oneself at once to discovering nothing of first-rate importance. Nevertheless, among all the scenes that one has expected—of saints, of the Disciples at Emmaus seated at table, and of shepherds bringing their sheep to the child Jesus—one suddenly finds oneself confronted with a strange little face, which the guides do not mention, which is like nothing one would have expected but which intrigues one, disturbs one, and by the insistence of its look, keeps one a few hours longer at Brescia than one had meant to stay.

Imagine, in front of a clump of green laurels—of a green that tends to be yellow—the bent head of a young woman crowned with fair hair and pearls. She is erect and is wearing a bluey-green velvet dress, and over it a garnet-red cloak lined with fur. She is leaning on her forearm, as though over a balcony, on a yellowish stone. To this add the impression made by the white lines of a beautiful bare neck as flexible as the stem of

a flower, a sidelong glance soft but insistent, a mouth half-open as though whispering a song or a plaint, a perfectly oval face, a complexion of amber and rose, rather more ruddy in the shadow, a hand holding a golden sceptre which cuts the picture diagonally—and you have an idea of this little portrait, half life-size, painted by Moretto. The colour scheme is in green and red—the yellowish green of the laurels, the bluey-green of the ribbon in the golden hair and of the dress itself, the pale green of the dress where it is covered by a veil, the garnet-red of the cloak appearing here and there, the reddish tints of the fur in certain places and the red gold of the sceptre.

The extreme insistence of the expression, the very modern waving of the hair, which is raised high on the neck, the coiffure as a whole, in fact, the strangeness of the accessories, make this figure something of a riddle. One can easily read, on the stone on which she is leaning, the words *Quae sacru ianis caput saltando obtinuit*, which indicate Salome in the clearest way possible. But if it were really Salome, why the sceptre, the laurels and all the attributes of glory, and where is John the Baptist's head? And if it is not Salome, then who is it? What allegory is this? Or what historical fantasy? One feels oneself to be in the presence of a portrait, and of a portrait treated with a liberty that a painter of that day would not have taken with a princess. The sceptre is not that of a king. The pose and the expression are not those of a great lady who wishes

to bequeath a souvenir to her children. . . . As one looks at it one discovers that it is the only live thing in the place, and one realizes that it is its obscure magnetism which has brought us, in spite of ourselves, in the course of an aimless stroll, to this old palace at the end of the gloomy streets of Brescia.

We are not the first to be intrigued by this face. For three years, in the middle of the XVIth century, from the winter of 1545-6 to the autumn of 1548, there was to be seen on the banks of the Arno in Florence a peculiar and very beautiful woman, an inspirer of poets and a poetess herself, whom all Italy puzzled over for twenty years without knowing exactly who she was. Whose daughter was she? Had she been married? Why was she so no longer? Why did she wander from city to city and never settle down? What did she want? What was she seeking in life? To which the ill-natured soon replied: "She is a courtesan." And they might have been able to prove the fact in a court of law: but in psychology this word "courtesan" explains nothing as regards her moral composition, any more than one can explain a queen by saying "She is a queen." Better informed persons knew that she had been born in Rome, forty years previously, in a house on the Campo Marzo: that her mother was a famous demi-mondaine, Giulia Campana, of Ferrara, and that her father was Cardinal d'Aragon, grandson of the King of Naples. From him she took her name, Tullia d'Aragon, though her

admirers in addition lavished upon her both in prose and verse all the names in the mythological calendar. In her childhood, being lively, precocious and cultured, she was much pampered by the Cardinal. But when he was dead and the fortune which had come from him spent, the demi-mondaine and her daughter had to tax their ingenuity in order to subsist, and as great respect was paid to family traditions in those days, the daughter followed her mother's profession. So well did she do so, in fact, that at Sienna, where she had just spent some time, an annoying adventure befell her.

There was found, one fine day, in the box set aside for anonymous denunciations a complaint stating that Signora Tullia had been seen on the day of the Feast of Pentecost wearing a *sbernia*, in spite of the law which forbade courtesans to wear that particular kind of short cloak. An inquiry, very wounding to the pride of the poetess, followed. But Tullia d'Aragon came out of it well, none the less. To everyone's surprise she produced an authentic husband, a certain Guicciardini, of Ferrara, and proved a perfectly regular relationship conferring upon her the right to wear the most extravagant dresses, at that time reserved solely for honest women. But the story of the *sbernia* was an awkward detail in the description of her which ill-natured Florentines spread about on her arrival in their city.

The detail was accurate, but there were many others! And her admirers did not fail to quote

them, too, as being equally authentic : that Tullia d'Aragon, for instance, was a poetess of some merit ; that some delightful sonnets of hers were well-known, and that one, on the nightingale, was famous ; that she sang so sweetly that one forgot the beauty of her mouth ; talked so wisely that one forgot the sweetness of her song ; moved so gracefully that her walk made one forget all the rest.

We can see something of all this in our portrait at Brescia, which M. Guido Biagi, following a persistent tradition, has identified as being that of Tullia d'Aragon. The inscription, indicating it to be Salome seems, it is true, to upset the hypothesis somewhat. But with a little juggling M. Guido Biagi gets over this obstacle. The portrait belonged for a long time to a convent, for which it had been bought by Count Tosio in 1829. The name of the courtesan who had delighted the men of her day would have made the picture an object of scandal to the nuns. So in its place they put the name of a dancer who had caused a saint's head to be cut off. The picture then became edifying !

Her pretty head, bare and without ornaments except for a helmet of tresses and pearls against a background of laurels, the big, suggestive eyes, the mouth half-open as though breathing an endless sigh, the supple neck, the pose—leaning forward as if overcome by the weight of the fur cloak and the sceptre—everything interests and instructs the person who looks at it to-day in the same way that the Florentine noblemen were

interested and instructed in 1546. For even when she was forty she still resembled this portrait, it seems. Niccolo Martelli assures us that "she was so beautiful that her delicate face preserved that angelic expression which she had formerly possessed," and addressing her in person he says "The whiteness of your complexion, which surpasses alabaster and the purest snow, preserves its freshness, thanks to your moderation and your continence, not only at the table but in all things, so that in our eyes you still seem to show in your face the gracious signs of love."

Those who were attracted by her languishing eyes were held by the suppleness of her mind. In Rome she collected round her all the most brilliant and cultured minds in the city. At her house the most subtle literary problems were discussed, with an infinity of wit, but with none of that pedantry that was to appear later at the Hôtel de Rambouillet. May we give an example of these controversies? On one occasion the question before the company was

"Did Petrarch imitate the ancient Provençal and Tuscan poets, or did he not?"

To which the latest arrival on the scene suggested this answer

"It seems to me, gentlemen," he said, "that Petrarch, being a man with a vivid and ingenious mind, treated the verses of the ancient poets as the Spaniards treat the clothes which they steal at night. To make them unrecognizable and to avoid the penalties to which robbers are liable,

they enrich them with some new and elegant decoration and then wear them openly!"

At Ferrara, where she lived for a long time, Tullia d'Aragon set an example of high virtue, remaining impervious to all offers, promises and temptations. A young nobleman, driven to extremities by her disdain and determined to play every rôle to obtain her hand, saw fit to stab himself in the breast in her house with much ceremony! From that episode she gained a great deal of esteem. She was mentioned in the same breath as Vittoria Colonna. The greatest ladies, and even kings, expressed no surprise at seeing her name coupled with theirs in Muzio's eclogues. She was referred to there both in verse and prose as being exceptionally virtuous. Her *salon* was possibly the leading "literary salon" of the time. Benucchi says in his dialogue *Sull' Infinita d'Amore*:

There are or have been few men of our time who were celebrated in arms or letters or any other profession who did not love and honour her I have mentioned many noblemen, *lettérateurs* of all kinds, lords, princes and cardinals who were constantly meeting in her house as though in a universal and honourable academy, and who honoured her and upheld her both formerly and at the present time, because of the unusual gifts of her very noble and very courteous mind I had already mentioned an infinite number and I mentioned still more, almost in spite of the lady herself who was talking and trying to interrupt me . . .

Another, Muzio, speaking to her in person said : "A form was conceived *ab æterno* in the mind of God. And it is in resemblance of this form that Nature made you on the day when she wished :

Here on earth to show all that she could to Heaven."

After that is it surprising that so many persons were prepared to guarantee her virtue? There were six noblemen in Rome who undertook in the following terms to cleave in two whoever doubted it —

The undersigned lords hold that virtue alone confers immortality on every generous spirit by means of an immortal fame which saves it from oblivion, whereas the vague and uncertain memory of mankind cannot do so. And they hold that virtue should be justly loved, respected and exalted to the highest point humanly conceivable, especially so when it is found existing in a being endowed with all the graces and all the gifts of fortune and nature. Consequently the undersigned, as true lovers and champions of that virtue which every noble heart, for love of truth, should always strive to protect, setting it forth in the light and letting it shine with all the splendour of the sun wherever it seems hidden or disguised—and being swayed by no other passion or motive, assert, while respecting the honourable laws of military discipline, before the whole world and with the intention of valiantly maintaining their contention on any given day, that their lady and Mistress, the illustrious Lady Tullia d'Aragon is, by reason of her infinite virtues, the most worthy woman of all women of the past, present or future.

And in order that anyone who should be jealous of her immortal glory and should speak of her or think of her in a manner other than that which is her just due may promptly declare himself, the undersigned vow to support her cause according to the rules of the tournament of the glorious knights of old. Thus, even if they were not already sufficiently clear and self-evident, the inestimable virtues of the aforesaid lady will be promulgated as they deserve, and by the same means the courage and worthiness of her servants will become more famous and more indisputable. Thus, too, everyone will be obliged to admit that, just as there are no knights superior in power to the undersigned, so, too, no lady like nor equal unto the above mentioned exists, has ever existed or will ever exist in the future. I, Paulo Emilio Orsini, pledge myself to uphold what is contained in this document. I, Accursio Mattei, pledge myself, etc.

This extraordinary challenge, which M. Guido Biagi extracted from the papers of the Rinuccini and was the first to publish, was signed by noblemen of considerable importance, amongst them an Orsini, an Urbino and a Rinuccini. There was even a rumour that it was signed by Filippo Strozzi, the great Florentine banker, and the richest, the most enlightened and most influential man of his age. The rumour was false: but what was true was that Tullia d'Aragon turned all heads, including those solid Florentine ones that we see in marble in the Bargello. Filippo Strozzi had not been able to resist her. At the time when he was in Rome as official ambassador to the Pope, Tullia had so bewitched him that he let her read his correspondence over his shoulder. Vettori, writing to him from Florence, taunted him after this fashion:

You are writing to me with Tullia at your side, but I would rather you did not read my answer when she is near you You are in love with her because of her wit but I do not wish her to be in a position to do me harm through anyone whom I may mention here I do not presume to lecture Filippo Strozzi, although, if lectures were able to correct, you would not be offended at being reprimanded, but I have heard stories of certain challenges which made me angry to think that a man such as yourself, forty-three years of age, would set out to do battle for a woman And although I am confident that you would be as successful in arms as in letters or in anything else to which you applied yourself, it pains me to see you expose yourself to danger for such a futile cause and I would remind you that men such as you are appear only once in a century And that is not flattery

This lecture was not uncalled for. The man

to whom it was addressed, though he did not lack genius, certainly lacked prudence, and was too busy looking into women's eyes to read, as clearly as he might have done, the eyes of men. Gifted as no other man was, handsome, *svelte*, charming, skilled in all sports, a poet and, in particular, a musician, an extremely able business man and a clever banker, Filippo Strozzi appeared to be a man of letters amongst *littérateurs* and a business man among business men, yet the jovial companions who frequented masked balls in his company could never have imagined that he would concern himself with anything but his pleasures. Such super-endowed personalities always owe a secret debt to Fate—through which comes their ruin. Filippo Strozzi, too certain of his own superiority, treated political causes, as he did his love affairs, in a spirit of levity—he never attached himself definitely to any one party, and consequently exposed himself to difficulties at every turn.

Six years after the letter which we have just read was written, Duke Alessandro having been assassinated by Lorenzaccio the "Forty-Eight"—senators of sorts—put on the throne of Florence a poor, timid, inexperienced boy of seventeen, doubtless in order to see what he would make of such a position. The scene is reproduced in bronze, as though it were a page from an illustrated paper, by Jean Bologne, on the pedestal of the statue to Cosmo I in the middle of the *Place de la Seigneurie*, and everyone would know it if they did not happen to be turned away from the monu-

ment by the inconvenient fact that there is a cab rank there.

Now this youth, given a little power, grasped it all. The face which appeared from beneath his timid mask was that of a tyrant, and it became necessary to fight him. . . . In spite of what Vettori had said of him, Filippo Strozzi was not as expert "in arms" as in "everything else." He gambled with the fortunes of his country on one throw of the dice, at Montemurlo, near Prato, without even waiting to get the game in his hands. He was defeated and captured, and with him was the whole of the Florentine nobility, which had rallied to him. He was taken to Florence and then the executions began. For a long time the Bargello resounded with the screams of unfortunate men who were put to the torture and with the blows of the executioner who beheaded them. None of the prisoners from Montemurlo came out of the Bargello alive. That famous courtyard, where to-day one sees young disciples of Ruskin placidly covering their sketching blocks with water colours and obtaining "impressions," was inhabited then by hapless men who might well have craved unconsciousness in order to be spared the frightful sights which met their eyes. The *Justice* which till surmounts the column in the *Place Santa Trinita*, erected in memory of the battle of Montemurlo, recalls the most fearful cruelty of the whole Renaissance period.

Filippo Strozzi had some right to expect a different fate. He had been shut up in the fort

*Saint-Jean-Baptiste*, now the *Fortezza da Basso*, built a few years before with his own money—from which one gathers that the victors did not lack a certain sense of irony. But the young sovereign, from the time when he was living, poor and solitary, at Trebbio with his mother, Maria Salviati, had been under an obligation to Strozzi. Among the letters which Tullia d'Aragon might have read over the latter's shoulder, was one from Maria Salviati in which she said

My son (Cosmo) and I are so impoverished and overwhelmed, not only by our private debts but by those due to the Government, that our situation is desperate unless someone helps us and gives us an opportunity to recoup. Wherefore we appeal to your generosity and if our other creditors oppress us, we entreat you to have so much the more pity on us. I implore and beg Your Excellency not to refuse us this favour. Cosmo and I commend ourselves to your Magnificence.

Your cousin and sister,  
MARIA SALVIATI DE MEDICI.

Did the dilettante imagine that at the end of seven years the service which he had rendered would still carry some weight? Or did he at last see the reality and understand what a sinister face was hidden under the mask of that timid orphan? At all events, on the morning of 18 December 1538 he was found dead in his prison.<sup>1</sup>

The tragic end of this honourable man moves us more, after the lapse of three and a half centuries, than it moved the beautiful Tullia when

That, at least, was what was said at the time. He was never seen again, alive or dead, by a reliable witness.

she arrived in Duke Cosmo's territory eight years later. What concerned this pseudo-woman of letters was to find a protector who would uphold her in her glory. On her arrival in Florence she asked who was first among the intellectuals. She was told that Benedetto Varchi was. So she decided that Benedetto Varchi should be her lover. Up till then she had never seen him, and for a long time she was not to know the kind of man he was. He lived buried away in his villa at Careggi as a consequence of unpleasant and perhaps undeserved suggestions which had been made on his methods of loving. This had resulted in more than one set-to with the *Huit de la Balia*, and had earned him a few days' imprisonment in the Bargello, a strong caution and orders to write the history of the Medici from 1527 to 1546, a task which a painstaking modern historian would regard as a kind of hard labour. But all that did not prevent Varchi from being much admired throughout Italy, where his accusers encountered nothing but rebuke, or from being something of a prophet even in his own country, where the Florentines would flock to see him pass by.

Tullia was little concerned with how Varchi would acquit himself in his account of the assassination of Filippo Strozzi, her former lover, by Duke Cosmo, now her sovereign. The gods had bestowed upon this woman the precious gift of being able to forget, whereby one can be unfaithful without remorse. She was thinking of one thing only : the conquest of the most illustrious of

poets by the most beautiful of women She began through the medium of literature. She addressed him as "My dear Master, *patron mio caro*" She asked his advice , sent him sonnets to correct , accused herself of being importunate, and excused herself for being so, perhaps , decided that she was Phyllis and that he was Damon , begged him to come back to Florence The more he read her, the more he resisted but he succumbed when he saw her "The conversation begun in verse was continued in prose,' as M Guido Biagi very neatly puts it. And he became so completely her devotee that he set himself to re-model her sonnets for her, including those which were destined, as he must have known, for other lovers Through him she recovered in Florence something of that literary court which she had gathered round her in Rome and at Ferrara Her enemies called her the "courtesan of the academicians," and those who were not quite her friends saw her as the academician of the courtesans. But the persistency with which she strove to maintain the part of the woman of letters makes us suspect that it was not entirely a part after all One, at least, of her sonnets, that on the *Rossignol*, which is to be found in all anthologies, is worth reading And this woman, who certainly had not enough talent to earn a place amongst the poets, had possibly sufficient taste for talent for her career as a courtesan to be a means of bringing her to them.

With regard to so unusual a personality as

Tullia's there is something of a mystery: so much so that no description has yet been found which exactly fits her—no word, in fact, which would give the key to her character or the thread which would connect the various elements of a definition of her. This word has not been found—perhaps because at that date it did not exist. When an individuality which is quite original in its own day appears it can only be defined by a “proper noun”. It is only when the character of this individuality becomes common to many others that it can be defined by a “common noun.” Tullia d'Aragon was an “intellectual,” with a taste for ideas, or at least a taste for men who possessed them, at a time when, except for princesses who held a court, no woman could satisfy such a taste. She was, in addition, a courtesan—of that there is no doubt—but that was due to the chance of her birth, the strictness of the times and respect for maternal traditions. She lived in an age when a penurious woman of no family could only enter the Olympus of the mind by means of her beauty.

These distinctions did not disturb the *Huit de la Balia*. Under a law promulgated by Duke Cosmo courtesans, even of the highest class, were obliged to wear a colour which would clearly indicate their profession even from a distance. This colour was yellow, to be worn on the head: a cloth or a kerchief, or a veil of some sort, which had to have a fringe of gold or of some other yellow-coloured stuff, a finger's length broad at

least, and so placed that it would easily be seen. And, no matter who they might be, they were not allowed to wear silk garments. One fine day the *Hunt* were informed that Tullia d'Aragon was wearing silk, which she had no right to wear, and that she was not wearing the yellow veil to which she had every right. They warned her about it. The poetess was astounded, indignant, and in despair. Like the bat in the fable, she declared that some error had been made "I am a poet look at my wings!" In her defence she collected the famous sonnets, signed by herself, and called upon Varchi to help her. The woman who was then ruling Florence beside Duke Cosmo, the Duchess Eleanor of Toledo, loved literature, and with her own white hands appeased her husband's anger. Tullia turned to her, sent her her sonnets, and laid stress on the many admirers of her talent. The Duchess saw behind that charming head the laurel bush painted by Moretto, she spoke in Tullia's favour to the Duke and on the petition itself Cosmo wrote *Fasselis gratia per poetessam*. Once again the mask of the poetess had hidden the features of the courtesan.

Perhaps it only showed itself at death. She returned to Rome, after having lost her mother and her young sister. Alone, ruined, aged, and dying in a wretched house in the Trastivere quarter, the pagan goddess became a Christian woman again, as did all those Renaissance characters who were adorned with the names of antiquity by the poets and with *diplois* and *calyptres* by the

painters. She received the last Sacrament with extreme piety, and made careful and devout legacies, amongst others the legacy imposed on courtesans by Clement VII in favour of converted nuns. She requested that no one should attend her funeral except Brothers of Saint Augustine and the Order of the Crucifixion, to which she declared herself to belong, and that she should be buried at night with the greatest simplicity. This was in 1556, in an era of strong paganism. But the paganism of the XVIth century kept more closely to the faith than the Christianity of many other ages has done. Already, a hundred years earlier, it had been said of la Bella Simonetta : “ At the moment of death, the nymph returned calm and confident to God.” Similarly, reading the report of the last words of a man condemned to death, one Boscoli, who in 1513, under the Medici, had emulated the Bruti, we can see that he had but one thought—to go to Christ and to deny the maxims and the examples of the pagan heroes “ who could not be good, since they had not the True Faith.”

Such were these people of the XVth and XVIth centuries. Under the hand of death, all their disguises fell from them, leaving their souls bare—and their souls were Christian. The good Sisters who, according to M. Guido Biagi’s hypothesis, wrote in the marble whereon Tullia is leaning the name which connects her with the death of John the Baptist, evoke in her regard ideas which are more fitting than those of the

poets who called her Tyrrhenia or Thalia. To play a part in a Christian mystery, even that of a traitor, is still to approach the saints, to cover oneself with the fringe of their majesty and to work for the triumph of the Faith. Not everyone can be Saint John the Baptist wherefore there is something rather fine in being Salome. Once the play is over, devils, traitors, thieves, torturers and courtesans appear in their true light—that of credulous and frightened Christians it is enough that they escape the indignation of the spectators at the end of the play—and everyone goes to Paradise.



PORTRAIT OF FLEANOR OF TOLEDO AND HER SON FERDINANDO

By Bronzino, in the Salle du Baroccio, Uffizi, Florence

To face p. 101

*ELEANOR OF TOLEDO  
IN THE UFFIZI*

Portraits of Eleanor of Toledo, wife of Cosmo I, Duke o.  
Florence .

Authentic · 1st, by Angelo Bronzino, in oils, Eleanor at about thirty-eight with this inscription at the bottom of the picture *Eleonora Toleta Cos Med. Flor d II. Uxor.*, painted about 1553, in the Salle du Baroccio in the Uffizi ; 2nd, by the same artist, at the Palais Vieux, in one of the windows of the *Studio*, at about eighteen years old , 3rd, in the Berlin Museum, head and shoulders and one hand , 4th, in the Collection Primoli, a small portrait at about eighteen, head and shoulders

5th, in the Wallace Collection, head and shoulders and both hands, a variant of that in the Uffizi, with the inscription *Fallax Gratia et vana est pulchritudo* Attributed to Angelo Bronzino.

6th, in the Museum Jacquemart-André, a variant of the Uffizi portrait

7th, in the Uffizi, a head and shoulders, attributed to Bronzino

8th, a medal by Domenico Poggini, head and shoulders, left profile, the head covered with a hair-net, and with the inscription *Eleonora Florentiae ducissa* On the reverse a peacock sheltering its young under its wings, with the inscription *Cum pudore læta fæcunditas*

9th, a medal, by the same artist, head and shoulders, left profile, bare-headed, the hair plaited and coiled behind the head, with pearls and jewels, a small plume at the back and with the inscription · *Eleonora Tole Med*

## *ELEANOR OF TOLEDO IN THE UFFIZI*

WHAT KIND OF A WOMAN was this Eleanor of Toledo to whom Tullia d'Aragon, in danger over the matter of the yellow veil, made supplication? When we visit the room known as the Baroccio in the Uffizi we find a full length portrait of her with her five-year-old son, Ferdinand, by Bronzino. Tall and upright, and wearing a heavily brocaded silver dress slashed with black arabesques, she is seated against a blue background—the icy blue of Ingres or Sassoferato. She is looking straight at us, sadly. Her right hand is placed behind the head of her boy, who is half hidden in the folds of her dress. Her left hand is stretched out on her knee and pointing to a large tassel of pearls. She has the small head frequently noticeable in tall women with broad shoulders, her eyes are rather wide apart, her mouth a little full, her nose straight, her whole face long and mild like that of a hind. Her hands are very long and very white. Her hair, drawn back and parted in the middle of her forehead, is carefully held within a net studded with pearls. There are pearls everywhere. Her shoulders are covered with a fillet of open-work lace with a pearl at each crossing in

the pattern. A string of pearls encircles her neck several times. Pearls seem to be dropping, one by one, from the lobes of her ears to the tips of her fingers. She might have passed through a shower of pearls. And for the rest of her costume : black mourning flowers on a white background, again for mourning, and here and there funereal gold. It is the splendour of the tomb. It could almost be described as a shroud. And in fact it was actually used as a shroud. In 1857 the Government had all the tombs of the Medici opened for purposes of identification. When they came to the sarcophagus containing the remains of Eleanor of Toledo, Duchess of Florence, wife of Cosmo I and grandmother of Marie de Medicis, they might have been looking at this very picture lying in the coffin. . . . Every detail of this costume was there except the jewels, which the despoilers of corpses had already put back into circulation. They are gleaming to-day, perhaps, under the electric lights of some "palace" on a woman of the New World, who is busy deploreding the fact that she did not live in the "good old times."

This picture of Eleanor of Toledo is one of the few official portraits which one feels to be really a likeness. All the features are handsome and regular, not one is commonplace. The pale complexion of the beautiful Spaniard, her eyes—large, gentle and extremely sad—her long face, her weary pose, all indicate a victim prepared for the sacrifice. This impression of her may be a wrong one, but can she herself deceive us?

It is 1553. The woman whose picture we have been looking at was quite young when she left the blue sky of Naples, where her father, the Duke of Alba, was viceroy, to come and shut herself up in the gloomy Palais Vieux. She has now lived there for ten years. Her husband had a hero for a father and a saint for a mother and he himself is a monster. He is the son of Jean des Bandes Noires, the Bonaparte of the XVth century, and of Maria Salviati, an excellent wife who recruited armies for her husband, bandaged his wounds, saved the remnants of his fortune, and ended her life in retirement and in good works. But in the son, the valour of the father became cruelty, and the gentleness of the mother deceit. At seventeen he was already inscrutable. His mask fitted so closely to his skin that no Florentine, not even his own mother, could distinguish the sinister features of his countenance, and when, in a moment of disorder, this timid youth—an impoverished orphan without influence—was invited to Florence because he bore a famous name and because people were not afraid of appointing a master over them, no one imagined that the city was being saddled with a tyrant and with a dynasty of tyrants which was to last for two hundred years.

We moderns are not so easily taken in, and we cannot possibly understand the blindness of the Florentines of 1537. The most ignorant, the least expert in psychology, of the tourists who wander from the Bargello to the Palais Vieux and from the Uffizi to the Pitti, cannot look at

the brutal, deceitful mask with which Bronzino, Benvenuto Cellini and Pontormo decorated all the walls, without being revolted by it: the smooth forehead, the eyes in which the pupils, leaving the lower edge of the eyelids, seem to be wandering uneasily over the milky eyeballs, the padlocked lips, the projecting jaw, the skin stretched over the muscles like a screen, devoid of the creases which display on a person's face the feelings he is experiencing, the bull-neck, the thick beard covering the cheeks—it is a head that might be placed on Bluebeard or on an executioner. And this is the man with whom Eleanor of Toledo spent twenty-three years of her life, whom she loved, it appears, and from whom two things only could distract her—her children and her pearls.

We only see one of her children beside her in this portrait: this is Ferdinand, he who, grown tall and fat, sits on horseback, in bronze, in the middle of the porticoed square known as the *Place Santa Annunziata*. But this was not her only child: she had seven others. Let us observe the whole eight of them, as she herself is doing in the gloomy rooms of the Palais Vieux whilst Duke Cosmo, assisted by Benvenuto Cellini, is busy with his goldsmiths' scissors scraping away at some antique statuette, freshly unearthed at Arezzo. The eldest is already fourteen, the youngest is still in the cradle. The three boys are clinging to the goldsmith's coat and teasing him in a hundred ways. The sun, which is setting behind the Cascina, is throwing its beams directly into the

windows of the palace facing the *Place de la Seigneurie*. From the *loggia dei Lanzi* the coarse voices of the bodyguard can be heard. The mother is day-dreaming, the children are playing. At what? These children sometimes invent queer games at strangling one another, putting each other to death, imitating scenes of assassination. What do these doings predict? What will the children become when they have left their cradle and taken flight "hors du charnier natal?"<sup>1</sup>

Maria, the eldest, is a child prodigy who knows Greek and Latin. Her portrait, in infancy, has already been painted by Bronzino. We see her here, not far from the portrait of her mother, as a serious and intelligent little person, comfortably installed in her armchair, like a miniature lady, with that air of precocious gravity which does not last long. Her parents hope to make her a Duchess d'Este some day. But that will not happen, for she will die in three years, at Pisa, carried off by fever, and it will one day be said that she was poisoned by her father because she fell in love with a page.

Lucrezia is to know a little more of the world before she leaves it—she will die of infectious pneumonia in exile, far from her parents, but only after the splendours of her marriage with the Duke of Ferrara and at that fatal age of seventeen which her elder sister is not destined to attain. It will be said of her, later, that she was poisoned by her husband for having been unfaithful to him.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Comme un vol de gersants hors du charnier natal"—J. M. de Heredia.

Isabella, who is the most attractive of Eleanor's daughters, will marry Prince Paolo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano : she will be strangled by her husband, one evening, in an isolated villa near Empoli by means of a cord ingeniously arranged to pass through a hole in the ceiling. It will be said that this was in punishment for her numerous infidelities.

The boys, Giovanni and Garzia, peevish rascals of eleven and seven, are known to us. Giovanni is the young cardinal whose portrait, painted by Bronzino, with his biretta on his head and a slight moustache on his lip, is in the Villa de Poggio a Caiano ; Garzia is the chubby child with a bird in his hand, near here. Both of them will die in their mother's arms, at Pisa, possibly the victims of a double crime, but perhaps simply of a pernicious fever caught in crossing the Maremmes. Their mother herself, worn out with fatigue and herself infected while at their bedside, will succumb a few days after them. It will be asserted later that Giovanni was killed by Garzia in a quarrel when out hunting, and that Garzia was killed by his own father to avenge Giovanni.

The two other boys, Francesco and Ferdinand, one aged thirteen and the other five, will reign in Florence, but the latter thanks only to the sudden and mysterious death of his elder brother ; the former will have the happiness of marrying and putting on the throne of Florence the woman he loves, but not until murder has made her a widow nor until an accident has made him a

widower—and there will be something singularly opportune about both occurrences. Finally, the baby who is sleeping in the cradle, Pietro, will kill his wife. If it is true that tragic events cast their shadows far in advance of them, what shadows must have lengthened there, on those evenings—shadows which were not all cast by the cypress trees on the slopes of San Miniato!

The infinite sadness of our portrait is now explained. The wife of a proved murderer, mother of a murdered son and of a murdered daughter—the son the murderer of his own wife, the daughter strangled by her own husband—and of four other children who died prematurely before her eyes, and, finally, the mother of two sovereigns, each of them suspected of murder, Eleanor of Toledo shows here, in her expression, the grief which she does not yet know and cannot foresee, but which she is already reflecting, as a mirror, knowing nothing itself, reflects someone coming behind us on the road, approaching us, threatening us.

There remain the pearls. Pearls were the most common jewel for women during this period, and in State portraits they are always in evidence but the superstition which declares that they are a sign of tears is particularly enhanced when one notices their abundance in certain portraits, as, for instance, in those of Henrietta of England and Eleanor of Toledo. There is, in the crenelated rock known as the Palais Vieux, on the first floor and near the room called the *Five Hundred*, a kind of cell, hollowed out by Duke Cosmo as

a hiding-place for his treasures. It is called the *Tesoretto*. It is a dark, vaulted dungeon, very dimly lighted by a solitary loophole opening on the narrow *Via Ninna*, but decorated and furnished like a boudoir. A dark ante-room, secret too, vaulted and shaped like a casket, leads into it. It is believed that later on Francesco de Medici made this his *studiolò* where he could give himself up, in peace, to his mysterious researches. Vasari filled this ante-room with amusing portraits. When the electric light is switched on the two ghosts of the Palais Vieux, Cosmo and Eleanor, appear at each end in two windows facing each other.

Eleanor appears in tones of old Cordovan leather, a captive in a trellis of gold studded with pearls, like a net thrown over her gilded cloak, which is open to display a raspberry-red corsage ; her languid hands, with their tapering fingers, are for ever in pursuit of some pearl. . . . She is covered with these jewels, which she has taken from the next room : she has two pendants, of heavy, massive stones, and pearls, always pearls, fall, drop by drop, on her shoulders, her arms, her hands, in a stream that becomes a chain. . . . We realize here her passion for large pearls, which she preferred to everything else, and which she forced her husband to buy for her at fantastic prices, whilst the Palais Vieux echoed to the sarcasm of Benvenuto Cellini, who would exclaim : “ But these are only fish bones ! ” . The signs of the Zodiac surround her, and all over the walls, her *amoretti* are at play. Facing her, in the

opposite window, is Duke Cosmo in armour—implacable, secretive. Husband, children, jewels everything which had occupied her mind seems collected here under the low vault of this *studiol*o

Was it everything, though? Did she never regret the radiant Neapolitan sky which she had left so young? Did she never know of those crimes which her husband had just committed when she came here? Did she have no presentiment of those passions which were to bring her children to such tragic ends? We do not know

Everything, both in her words and in her conduct, indicates a spirit acclimatized to the horrible atmosphere into which she came to live. She breathed it naturally. Her one anxiety was to keep her daughters straight, to confine them to the palace where they were seen only by the ladies of the Court and by their old Confessor. Her constant care was to help her husband—with her revenues, with her influence at the Spanish Court, with her advice. Duke Cosmo loved her. To her he devoted that modicum of goodness which always exists in the worst of characters, as if as evidence that after all they, too, are only human. He was a good husband as he was a good father, munificent in his gifts, shrewd in speech, ingenious in providing amusement. True, one part of his life consisted of scandal and intrigue with Leonore degli Albizzi and Camilla Martelli. But that part began only after the death of the Duchess. He was faithful to her while she lived.

She, on her side, accepted him with the best possible grace. When, newly married, she arrived at the Medici palace, she found a lively and intelligent little girl running at large all over the house.

“That is my daughter,” her husband said.

She adopted her and brought her up as if she had been her own child. She also adopted her husband’s tastes. Duke Cosmo was an antiquary and a scholar, interested in all the processes of art : he would discuss the details of a bronze casting point by point, and would hide himself in a window above the main gateway of the Palais Vieux to hear the comments of the crowd on newly erected statues. Similarly the Duchess became enthusiastic over specimens of plastic art, supported Cellini against Bandinelli, and when an artist produced a work to her liking forbade anyone to remove it from the palace, or even out of her sight. Thus, if we may credit the memoirs of the period and its written history, she seemed to have enjoyed all the refinements of life.

But in her two portraits and in all her actions everything indicates that her life was joyless and that she was indifferent to the fact that it was slipping away from her. She knew that she was ill : she had a congested lung which caused her to spit blood and choke, but she obstinately refused all attention. The letter in which Duke Cosmo described her death has been found. The misfortune happened during a journey which he was making with his wife and sons to visit the new fortresses in the fever-infected Maremmes. The

letter should be read in front of this portrait of her for never have traits of character corresponded more exactly with physical features. The Duke is writing to his eldest son, Francesco, at that time in Spain. He has just described, in his own fashion, the sudden death of the two brothers, Don Giovanni and Don Garzia, who had succumbed to the fever. And he adds —

But how can I finish this letter when I have still to tell you something else, which is, on the one hand, even sadder and yet, on the other, more joyful! Joyful, I mean, for the man who can detach himself from worldly things and consider Heaven only and not the world and its miseries and vanities. With God's help I must continue. The Duchess was greatly distressed by the unexpected news of the illness of the Cardinal (her son) and was in ill health during these few days. Having comforted him she came on to Pisa, where her chronic fever affected her still more, and she began to lose her appetite. She kept up her strength, however. At that moment Don Garzia (her other son) became ill. Her fever got worse, she lost her appetite still further and would not let herself be attended to by the doctors—which, as you know, was her usual attitude. Then Don Garzia became desperately ill and finally died. We hid his death from her, but in spite of that she was so worried that she could not sleep and grew worse every day. She was in despair and worked herself up into such a state that she was even worse than she would have been if she had known of his death. But although we still did not tell her, she was so clever that she realized that beyond a doubt he was dead. Then it seemed wiser to tell her that he was very bad and to put her off with that rather than to deny everything. And so in the end she grew calmer, outwardly, and said that she accepted Don Garzia's death as a mercy. Although we still denied it, she would not believe us. This continued for three days. Then a high fever ensued, but passed, after two crises, and left her with her usual fever and no appetite whatever. But on my earnest entreaty she took more food than she had been eating of late—and she sadly needed it, for at the time of the Cardinal's death she went for nearly three days without

eating or sleeping. And all the time, ever since last summer, she had that cough, which, as you know, she always had, but now it was much worse so much so, in fact, that her catarrh increased and prevented her from breathing properly. The fever diminished, however. She could not last like this for many days and so, three days before her death, speaking still with extraordinary emotion and courage, she confessed and took communion. One day before she asked for Extreme Unction and prior to that, in my presence, made a very honourable will, thinking first of her soul and then of her household servants. It could be said that she gave up her soul to God almost from my arms. Fully conscious, she waited for death for two whole days, with a crucifix almost always in her hand and seated on her bed talking about death quite simply as though it were some ordinary matter. Up till the last she could speak and recognize everyone as if she were still in perfect health.<sup>1</sup>

Leaving the Uffizi, let us go on a few steps and enter the *Palais de la Seigneurie*, which adjoins it. Everyone knows this greyish rock surmounted by a plume and overlooking the whole of Florence. It is a solid block, with overhanging battlements pierced here and there with holes for windows, with a dungeon, opening on to daylight, built on to the front of it like a plume on the front of a helmet and splayed out above towards the sky.

<sup>1</sup> Is this the letter of a murderer describing the death of his victim? Yet for the chroniclers of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries there was no question about it for them the murder of Eleanor of Toledo by Duke Cosmo was an article of faith. And there is no question about it for modern historians it is a ridiculous fabrication. The publication of all Duke Cosmo's letters to his son, corroborated by the private letters of Sargudi, auditor to the papal nuncio in Tuscany, settled the matter. But to know whether Giovanni and Garzia really died of fever caught in the Maremmes, or, as was then thought, whether one was killed by his brother and the other by his father, is another affair. It is still an open question. It is not discussed here, because we are concerned with the character of Eleanor of Toledo and not with that of her husband.

The place has the appearance of a prison, and has, in fact, often served that purpose. They still show one the cell in the tower where Cosmo, the "Father of his Country," before he became great, and Savonarola, after his fall, were supposed to have been shut up. It is a prison within a fortress—impregnable, rugged, sheer. It suggests the executioner, and, in truth, more than one execution took place behind those walls, without counting the murders which bespattered them with blood in every revolution. There is scarcely a window which has not served as a gallows, scarcely a paving stone which has not been red with blood. It was here that Duke Cosmo brought his young wife, a year after their marriage, and kept her shut up until the time when he went to live in the Palais Pitti—that is to say, for nine years, from the end of 1541 to May 1550. They returned there on many occasions after the acquisition of the Palais Pitti, and hence they called it the "Palais Vieux."

It was not his family residence. His residence was the Palais Medici, now the Palais Riccardi, in the Via Larga, now the Via Cavour. But in the Palais Medici Cosmo did not feel himself master of Florence. Imposing though it was, it was a private house. The *Palais de la Seigneurie*, or Palais Vieux, was the Government House, a public building, as it is again to-day. In the history of the revolutions of Florence it played the same part which the Hôtel de Ville did in the French Revolution. Whoever held the *Palais de la Seigneurie*, held Florence.

Cosmo made it his lair as though he did not believe that his power was indestructible. For his own convenience he annexed to it the two palaces of the Captain and of the Executor of Justice, which were a continuation of it. He got rid of the lions which for centuries had been wont to roar in a house and courtyard on the side facing the street which is still called *Via Leoni*. He filled the *Loggia dei Seignori* with his German mercenaries. Their barracks were quite close—hence the name, preserved to this day—*Loggia dei Lanzighinetti* or *dei Lanzi*. Finally he fitted up, indifferently well, for his own use and for that of his family, the rooms formerly occupied by the *Priori* and the *Gonfalonière*.

Eleanor of Toledo was installed on the second floor, in the angle marked nowadays by a marble group by Cacus, in four rooms, which one can still see, though they are much better decorated now than they were when she knew them: a kind of dining-room with two windows facing south, on the side where the Uffizi galleries are now and two windows opening on the inner courtyard; then a study, in an angle, with a south window looking towards the Uffizi and a west window facing the courtyard in front of the *Loggia dei Lanzi*; and finally a bedchamber with one window on the courtyard. All these rooms led one into the other, as was the custom then. The tiny retreat puts one in mind of a hiding-place rather than of a royal apartment. It is in daylight for only a few hours each day when the sun is

setting and one has to climb several steps to reach a window and see out of doors.

If one turns round one has a view of the inner courtyard, it is true, but that was a dull sight a wide, empty well, so to speak, where in those days the pictures, the fountain, the delightful child with a dolphin by Verrocchio and the stucco decorations which now cover the columns with their delicate arabesques were not to be seen. It was a bare, black hole. Such were the cells in which Eleanor of Toledo lived the years of her youth, and where we must go if we wish to retrace her footsteps. Nor do we find it difficult to picture the tall white silhouette of the Uffizi portrait wandering in this pitch black corner of a palace filled with bloody memories—so sinister a place that for centuries no one had thought of making a woman live there.

In the long, solitary days, when the only distractions were to listen to the drolleries of the dwarf or climb to the window and watch the brutal games of the Lanzi posted under the *Loggia*, the pious Duchess must often, very often, have stared at the three bas-reliefs facing her and almost on a level with her, on the front of the *loggia*, statues carved by the rough chisel of Jacopo di Piero. There are *Faith* with her chalice, *Hope*, making a gesture to Heaven, and *Charity*, with her stone torch in her hand and on her knees a child whom she is suckling. Weather-worn and now quite grey, these three figures, grown old under the sky in the company of the birds and the bells,

were as white then as was the fair Spaniard herself. And when Eleanor left her window and walked through her rooms it may have seemed, perhaps, to the inhabitants of the dungeon that they were watching the passage of a sister of the three marble statues : the living sister of Resignation.





PORTRAIT OF BIANCA CAPPELLO

By Bronzino, in the Prometheus Room, Pitti Palace, Florence

To face p 119

*BIANCA CAPPELLO  
IN THE PITTI PALACE*

Authentic portraits of Bianca Cappello, wife of Pietro Bonaventuri and subsequently of Francesco I, Grand-Duke of Tuscany

1st By Angelo Bronzino in the Prometheus Room, in the Pitti Palace, in the Uffizi and at Poggio a Caiano, and by an unknown artist, at about the age of forty, also in the Uffizi  
Attributed without justification to Bronzino, in the National Gallery (John Samuel Bequest)

2nd By Alessandro Allori, a piece of a fresco from a room in the parish church of *Santa Maria ad olmi*, in the Uffizi

3rd Medals by Pastorino of Sienna, one in profile, the other three-quarter face and crowned, both bearing the inscription *Biancha capp med duc etruriæ* A cameo by Bernardino di Castel Bolognese in the Bargello

A portrait presumed to be by Titian, Bianca at the age of twenty, formerly at Torre del Gallo

## *BIANCA CAPPELLO IN THE PITTI PALACE*

IN THE PROMETHEUS ROOM in the Pitti Palace there is a portrait of a young woman, painted by Bronzino, not so arresting as other pictures of less importance, yet achieving a kind of beauty which, even in nullity, is absolute. It is that of a pretty but ineffectual young person, doubtless of some importance, judging by her brocaded costume, her open ruff, scalloped and pleated *a lattughine*, her embroidered veil fringed with *tremoli*, her coronet and her necklace of enormous pearls, her massive pendant and her rattle-shaped ear-rings. Her hair is parted in the middle, and she is three-quarters facing us, very straight and motionless as she looks at us with that neutral, absent-minded expression which women know how to assume when, sure of their beauty, they can afford to economize in their souls. Her face is very lovely—one of those completely regular and impenetrable masks which God always sees fit to give to an emotional soul. And though hundreds of years have gone by and hundreds of books or pamphlets have been written about her, we do not know even now what went on behind that mask.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One of these studies—and the most brilliant of them—is that of M. Blaze de Bury. He has described the characters of the Grand Duke

What we do know lends itself to every hypothesis. During the winter of 1563-4, Prince Francesco de Medici, the eldest son of Cosmo I and Eleanor of Toledo, came across a very romantic piece of news in the correspondence of the Florentine secret agent at Venice, a certain Cosmo Bartoli. Bianca Cappello, a girl of noble family, about sixteen years old and marvellously beautiful, had just run away, on the night of the 28-29th November, with a little bank clerk. They had reached the mainland and no one knew what had become of them. The abductor was a Florentine—hence the full account of the incident which Bartoli wrote to his master. The bank in which this young man, whose name was Pietro Bonaventuri, worked was not far from the palace at Santo Appolinare, at *ponte storso*, in which the beautiful patrician lived. The two young people had seen each other, found means to correspond and then to meet. Finally they became betrothed, and fearing discovery had hired gondoliers to assist them to escape. The scandal was a very considerable one. The family of the young girl, the Cappelli, related

Cosmo, the Grand Duke Francesco and Bianca Cappello with surprising distinctness. If certain details in the sketch which we have attempted here differ noticeably from those in our preceding studies, it is because the works of erudite Italians have brought to light documents which were either unpublished or mutilated or the authenticity of which had not been proved when Blaze de Bury was writing. The letters of the Grand Duke Cosmo to his son, reproduced by Enrico Guglielmo Sittini in his *Tragedie medicee domestiche* (Florence 1898) must be specially noted. Sittini spent some of his life in collecting materials for a book on Bianca Cappello unfortunately he was not able to carry his task to a conclusion, but the fragments which he left are of unquestionable value, and it is hardly possible to study her personality without having recourse to them.

as it was to the Morosini and the Grimani, was one of the most important in Venice, while that of the abductor was of very little account. The gondoliers who had helped in the flight were discovered. They were arrested, together with their wives, and put to death by torture. Bonaventuri's uncle was also tortured to death for not have been able to keep a better watch on his nephew. The police were set on the tracks of the fugitives, and with all solemnity, at the top of the Rialto, a price was put on their heads. But that served no purpose, and everyone was asking where Pietro Bonaventuri could have gone with his prey.

He had gone quite cheerfully to his own home in Florence, where his father, a notary and keeper of commercial records, *della Mercanzia*, owned a little house in the *Place Saint Marc* (Savonarola's square), a narrow place with a two-windowed frontage which one still sees, though more or less transformed, on the opposite side to the church. Here is a subject for a picture which no one has yet painted, a subject which is not only psychological but picturesque as well—something not unlike Madox Brown's *The Last of England*—the flight of the two proscribed lovers, clinging to each other and shivering, across the stagnant waters to Fusina, whilst the first light of day, appearing behind their heads, feebly illuminates the flat banks and thin arbutus-trees on the mainland where they are about to step ashore. No one could say then, and these two children least of all, that the light furrow traced by the gondola in the calm water

of the lagoon would seem one day to be a connecting link between two great cities which had been rivals and enemies for centuries. Most probably they were thinking of nothing, seeing that they were in love, "Un bagage est nécessaire . . ." says the poet.<sup>1</sup> They carried with them the curses of a whole city, a few jewels from the palace of the Cappelli, and the idea that they were going to live in the seventh heaven !

They lived with the notary, and they lived ill. Their first care was to cross the *Place Saint Marc* to have their hurried betrothal blessed in the church opposite. But the regularization of their union did not bring them good luck. The news from Venice was bad. Far from pardoning them, Bianca's father, the illustrious Bartolemeo Cappello, promised a considerable bounty to anyone who would avenge his honour. It was not long before Bianca and her husband ceased to feel that they were safe. Agents appointed by the Most Serene Republic were always prowling round the *Place Saint Marc* in Florence, and were considered much too honest to draw their pay without trying to earn it by doing some useful work. That, at least, was what Pietro Bonaventuri put into the mind of Bianca, whom he kept confined as though she were in a gaol. And that, moreover, was what he told Prince Francesco de Médici when he went to beg the latter's protection.

Thus for the second time was the young prince brought into the affairs of the lovers from Venice.

<sup>1</sup> Victor Hugo

When he had first received the news, in Bartoli's letter, he had tried to save their uncle Bonaventuri. And he had tried all the more because the latter, a Florentine and ostensibly a director of a Venetian bank, was also a secret agent for the Duke of Florence—in other words a spy. But the Senate of Venice did not readily give up its victims. Bonaventuri was dead in his prison, and the prince failed in his first effort. But he was twenty-three, and his imagination set to work. Day by day his curiosity was increased by all that he was told of Bianca Cappello, for in those remote times Florence was a town given to gossip and delighting in scandal. He wanted to see the heroine of this drama, this charming head round which the whole of an infuriated Venice placed a flaming aureole. Then he met her at the house of a lady of the Court, the very accommodating Marquise de Mondragone, and at the first glance he succumbed to her. Mother-in-law Bonaventuri was an accomplice in their meetings, and a regular conspiracy was hatched round the girl in order to throw her into the arms of the young prince. She was persuaded that he alone could save her husband. She believed it—and lost him.

Francesco, then, was interested in Bianca Cappello. He was too interested in her, in fact he went beyond what was necessary to assure her safety and up to the point of risking his own. He went right across the city at night to visit her, in spite of the paternal advice of Duke Cosmo, who had no need to take a similar risk seeing that

he himself had installed his mistress, a certain Camilla Martelli, near him in his own ducal villa. The prince's passion for Bianca grew greater when he was with her and was only enhanced by her absence. When he had left Florence and was on his way to Austria to meet an ugly, austere and disdainful Archduchess to make her his wife he was thinking only of Bianca Cappello, and wrote her a number of verses which are no worse than any other amorous verses of the period. Eventually, when, married to the Austrian, he had returned to his own country and had been installed, as a kind of Regent, in the Palais Vicux, which had just been redecorated for the young Archduchess, he brought the husband, Pietro Bonaventuri to Court, put him in charge of the Wardrobe, and gave his household a palace in the Via Maggio on the left bank of the Arno. This palace is still to be seen, and still bears the name Bianca Cappello. Bronzino's portrait of her in the Pitti Palace dates from about this time. The face is small and rather sad and, compared with that painted by Titian when Bianca was only twenty, is longer and almost thoughtful. She was then at the zenith of her beauty—one imagines her to have been supple and slim still—and at the decisive point of her life: before that date her life was romantic; afterwards it was historic.

But was it to be historic? If she was to appear in history, it was essential for her husband to go out of it. He was an eventual obstacle, and in no case a safeguard. The prestige of this married

woman was reduced to something very small, for the fidelity of the one man was not great enough to compensate for the lack of fidelity in the other. The quondam clerk, with honours thick upon him, disclosed his baseness of soul to all eyes. There is one point, indeed, which has not been touched upon by the historians—that is the question of whether, when he ran away from Venice with the reckless daughter of the Cappelli—this beauty who dazzled everyone who beheld her—whether love was in truth the only fury which urged him or whether he had not some personal ambition as well. Through his uncle, the secret agent of Duke Cosmo, he was very well acquainted with the paths that led to the Palace. The manner in which he conducted the affair—hints of the danger of his wife being discovered, the obtaining of the Prince's intervention, the phlegm with which he accepted what ought to have made him desperate, the way he seemed to glory in his shame, the cheerful life which he led from that moment onwards—all that sheds a very ugly light on this adventurer. We would have been delighted to recognize the silhouette of a fool. But we come upon that of an intriguer.

No one was very incensed, therefore, on hearing one fine morning in August 1572—the 25th to be exact—that on the night before Pietro Bonaventuri, on his way home from the Strozzi Palace where he had supped and taken the lead in a grand fête, had been attacked and killed on the other side of the Arno, just after he had crossed it by the

*Pont Santa Trinita*, by a party of armed men at the head of which was his rival in amorous conquests, Roberto de Ricci. Not much time was wasted in asking if the dead man's wife had something to do with this abrupt ending to a delicate situation. It worried her very little, it seemed, for the thought that she might wish to marry someone else did not enter anyone's mind. Assassination was then quite a normal instrument of widowhood ; but in those days of uncertain diagnosis, of chronic malaria, of dangerous roads and complicated vendettas, it was impossible to tell in exactly what proportion plague, poison, brigands or police agents collaborated in the loosening of conjugal chains.

It is not far from the end of the bridge where Bonaventuri was killed to the palace of Bianca Cappello, which is still standing in the Via Maggio, with its almond-shaped door and its great windows of iron lattice-work—melancholy, dusty and sleepy—just as it was on that sinister night of 25 August 1572. More sleepy now perhaps. It must have heard, in the stillness of night and through windows open in summer, the shouts and the clash of steel—for the wretch fought in his own defence. And then it was all over. She was a widow, quit of a man who had dishonoured her for the second time. And at the end of the alley opening out in front of her house like a cleft in a rock, was her lover's palace, and somewhere in the outskirts of Florence was her lover himself, waiting in his country retreat for the day when he would be able to grant her all that she might ask.

What she did ask when she threw herself at his feet, in her long mourning crêpe and with her face ravaged by the horror of that tragic night, was "Justice! Justice!" She swore that she longed for the discovery and pursuit of her husband's murderers, whoever they might be, and for their punishment. She had with her her daughter, the little Pellegrina, the aptly named child of the two fugitives, and desired to live only for her, calling Heaven to witness that she was going to return to her own country—where, probably, no one would be unduly excited at seeing her again. It was an edifying example of virtue and conjugal love. The Court, or at any rate part of it—and that the important part—was rather taken with it. The Duchess of Bracciano, the charming daughter of Eleanor of Toledo, wrote thus from her bed to Bianca

I love you more than a sister

As for the Grand Duke, his feelings had not changed. There is extant a note of his, written at about this date and sent to her with a little painted wax tablet. This is it

BELOVED BIANCA,

I am sending you from Pisa a portrait of me done by our master Cellini. My heart goes with it.—DON FRANCESCO

Everything, then, was conspiring to make the beautiful widow Grand Duchess of Tuscany—everything, that is, except the Grand Duchess herself. For there was one existing already, a

fact which was apt to be forgotten amid all this hubbub. And she, grumpy, small, haughty and ill-shapen though she was, was the Emperor's sister and therefore of some account. In the hue and cry of XVIth-century Florence she produced that kind of austere virtue with regard to which, since it was not the result of spite, one never knew whether it came from Heaven or Hell. She persisted not only in remaining alive for a further six years, but also in presenting her husband with a number of children—one son and several daughters, of whom one was Marie de Medicis, the future queen of France. Nevertheless the patience of Fate is not everlasting. One day when she was again near her time she was allowed to fall on the palace steps and, fortunately for the projects of the Grand Duke, she died without much further delay. His only son, the little Prince Filippo, also died a few years afterwards. Learned men have since then shown that these accidents were natural enough, but the people of Florence, habituated to them though they were, were none the less startled at the fact that all the tragic deaths which took place round Bianca Cappello were invariably to her advantage. They professed a cordial hatred for her, and called her "The Sorceress."

In revenge another people took her to its heart. On the day when it became possible for her to become Grand Duchess of Tuscany, Venice remembered that she was a Venetian. A supreme decree of the Senate declared her to be "a true and especial

daughter of the Republic" in consideration of her "distinguished virtues" Three hundred and sixty cousins were born to her between one day and the next, and clad themselves in crimson silk as a sign of their joy The lagoons were lighted up and magnificent embassies were despatched Every allusion to her flight and her condemnation was erased from the registers of the Avvocaria They could not bring back to life Uncle Bonaventuri and the gondoliers who had been tortured to death to teach them to keep a better guard over youth, but since her father was still available they brought him to Florence that he might see the daughter whom he had formerly cursed crowned there, and he derived much honour from it.

He thought his daughter very much changed But was she so very different? This woman, whose career may seem a prodigy of intrigue and ambitious industry, was exactly the same as the one who had fled from Venice with a penniless youth and perhaps, at this moment, she was no more thinking of the gorgeous future which she had now recovered than, in the former case, she was thinking of the equally gorgeous future which she was leaving behind her She was becoming a queen as she had become a pariah—for love. Look at all the portraits of her which have been painted in none of them do we see the attributes of royalty They appear only in one of Pastorino's medals. There is here nothing solemn, as there is in all those full-length portraits of grand dukes and grand duchesses which stretch along the inter-

minable corridor running from the Uffizi to the Pitti Palace and cross the Arno, in a gloomy row, like a procession of ghosts suspended in mid-air. We may search for traces of her in the palaces of Florence but will find hardly any. But there are many in the modest villas of the Medici, in those days simple little places on the outskirts of Florence, as was, for instance, Poggio a Caiano. The fact was that whereas ordinary upstarts would have blazoned forth their happiness, she hid hers. No one was ever less of a queen. Once in possession of her husband, she forgot the rest. Formerly she had tried a daring imposture : she had pretended to be pregnant and had one day produced, as her son, the child of a poor Tuscan peasant. But she had not dared to persist in her deceit before the man she loved.<sup>1</sup> She confessed every-

<sup>1</sup> Were it not for the murders which so often assured the secrecy of affairs of state during this period this story would be merely comic. In 1575 Bianca Cappello pretended to be pregnant, and in August 1576 despatched a devoted follower of hers, a certain Giovanna Conti, to find some women who were shortly to become mothers. She selected three of them, had them looked after with the greatest attention in various houses in Florence and visited by a doctor, named Gazzi, whom she had won over to her cause. When one of them, a handsome countrywoman, who was thus being cared for in a house close to the prison *des Stinche*, brought into the world on the night 28-29 August, 1576, a male child who, appeared fit to be an heir and a prince, Bianca pretended that her own delivery had taken place. The Grand Duke, woken up in the night, hurried to his mistress' bedside, and seeing the fine baby which had just been brought in, and having no doubt whatever that it was his own son, decided that he should be called Antonio. The real mother, as soon as she was well enough, was taken in secret to Bologna and given a post as a nurse in the house of the Pepoli. Two years later, returning to Bologna after a journey to Florence, she was met on the road by hired ruffians and shot. She died in the hospital at Bologna, but not, however, before she had time to tell the whole story to a certain Father Cecchi.

thing to him, and he was in no way concerned Montaigne, who happened to be in Florence in 1580, and was present at a dinner in the Pitti Palace, was surprised to see the Grand Duchess occupying the place of honour above her husband

"She seems," he said, "to have the self-sufficiency to have captivated the prince and to have retained his devotion for a long time."

Montaigne's view was an accurate one. They were as faithful to each other during the nine years which they spent together as they had been during the fourteen years spent on two very different social planes. Henceforth only death could separate them.

But it did not separate them. The "Sorceress" had many a time said that there would not be days but only hours between her husband's last breath and her own. Once again her magic power was displayed. One autumn evening, at Poggio a Caiano, as the Grand Duke was returning from hunting, he lingered by a small lake and caught a tertuary fever which took strong hold of a constitution not only worn out but long since aggravated by the fearsome medicines which he used to compound for himself. Ingeniously, but in vain, he sought relief in remedies made up from extractions taken from goats, crocodiles and hedgehogs.

The Grand Duke then learnt the truth. Nevertheless the child, who was not his son, nor that of his wife nor even of his mistress, continued to call himself Antonio de Medici. He was made legitimate in 1583 and later on was overwhelmed with favours, created Duke of Campestra and legate of the King of Spain in Italy.

In a few days he was in his last agony. Bianca, stricken with fever at the same time, and unable to be at his bedside to nurse him, was consumed with anxiety and sent constant messages to him. The Grand Duke's brother, Ferdinand—he whom we saw at the age of five or six in the portrait of Eleanor of Toledo—was present. He had quarrelled with Francesco and Bianca years before, and had become reconciled with them only a few days previously. And now, as heir presumptive to his brother, he prowled round the sick-rooms—sick himself with impatience and greed. Pellegrina, Bianca's daughter, set to work to snatch from her mother, as soon as she became unconscious, the legacy of 30,000 scudi which she knew was in the hands of the Keeper of the Purse. The Archbishop of Florence and other Church dignitaries were ordering their mules and litters to be prepared ready to start for the city and bring the news of death as though it were news of a victory. Within the Villa Poggio a Caiano, that great arcaded square of stone which looks so calm in the sunshine of to-day and which has since been the scene of so many pleasant assemblies, there was being enacted, in the torrid days of the Tuscan autumn of 1587, a triple tragedy of which we shall doubtless never know all the baseness and the horror.

Bianca, who had always sacrificed her dignity to her love, displayed, now that she was alone and in dire peril, the dignity which is always found wanting in hearts where there is no love. Feeling

that she was very ill she sent for her Confessor and said to him

Make my farewells to my Lord Francesco de Medici and tell him that I have always been very faithful and very loving. Tell him that my illness has only become serious because of his own and ask for my pardon if I have offended him in any way

The man to whom this message was addressed was lying in an adjoining room already dead. The noise, the unusual hurrying to and fro of feet, the stamping of horses and the rumbling of vehicles setting out for Florence in that mad flight which ensues upon the death of kings, tears scarcely restrained on some faces, joy ill-concealed on others, the sudden appearance of two cardinals in her room—her brother-in-law, the Cardinal Grand Duke, and the Cardinal Archbishop of Florence—all this told the unfortunate woman in her agony that her sole support on earth was no more.

If he lives, I live if he dies, I am nothing.  
So strongly is my soul united to his  
That his end will be followed by mine,

she had often said, as Ronsard had said before her. The moment had come to keep her word, and she kept it. Less than eleven hours passed before she died, thus proving by her mastery over what is the least easily mastered thing in the world, that there was in her something else besides a courtesan's ambition, and that her witchcraft was composed of love.

Then there took place a scene for which, to

do it justice in painting, we would have to ante-date the birth of Zurbaran or Valdês Léal. Pellegrina, watching her mother die, lost neither time nor her wits. There was present a man who was devoted to her, one Father Maranta, the dying woman's confessor. Pellegrina dictated to him a declaration which came, she said, from the mouth of Bianca Cappello. By this all the money then in the hands of the Keeper of the Purse, except for 5,500 scudi each to the secretary and the cup-bearer, was left to Pellegrina herself. As the dying woman could not sign this declaration, the doctor, then Bishop Abbioso, and then Father Maranta himself, were asked to sign for her, certifying that those were her last wishes.

The document [says Abbioso] was immediately brought to be read to the Arch Duchess, who was being held up in a sitting position in her bed by several ladies. The text was read from the side of the bed because there was a crowd of people at both its head and foot. I myself, in fact, was unable to come close. Before the reading was finished I heard some people present saying "It's not worth while going on. Can't you see that she is no longer conscious? She has already passed away." Others were saying. "Read on to the end, for she is alive and can hear!" and such like words. On that I forced my way forward to see for myself whether she was alive or dead. I found that she was in a swoon and was not conscious of anything. . . .

Thus expired, amidst a seething mass of intrigue and hatred, Francesco de Medici and Bianca Cappello, the Philemon and Baucis of murder.

Murder? But are we so sure of that? Bianca Cappello's greatest trait, her dominant passion, is

no mystery. Her secondary traits—scrupulousness or daring, good or ill faith—and her auxiliary passions are still riddles to us. And neither the portrait by Bronzino which we see in the Pitti, nor that in the Uffizi in which the face is fuller and less intelligent, nor the other, also in the Uffizi, done at a time when she already had dropsy, in which she is fat and gross and time has begun to put its necklace of wrinkles round her neck—none of these give us all the information we need. It is true that they are by mediocre hands, except Bronzino's and even his hand was weary. The portraits in words, the letters folded away in the archives are not very revealing either. But one single trait rivets our attention—that of benevolence, the all-embracing benevolence which we can easily reconcile with her cruelty towards certain people. We see Bianca always busy winning hearts, dissolving hatreds, reconciling enemies. It was she who by her persistent entreaty brought the Cardinal back to his brother and installed him at Poggio a Caiano, where he was lucky enough to be in the nick of time to grasp his heritage to the throne.<sup>1</sup> All those who came near her, except

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Fernando de Medici was heir presumptive to the Grand Duke, whose only male child was dead. He cordially detested his sister-in-law. The latter wished to evict him (*as heir*) and to be reconciled to him at one and the same time. In September 1586 she tried *as* she had already tried in 1576 to pretend that she was pregnant and to prepare for the arrival of a child which she meant to pass off *as* the heir. But she felt herself closely watched by the agents of the Cardinal, who was quite determined not to allow an imposture so prejudicial to his interests to be accomplished. She then pretended to be entirely mistaken *as* to the sentiments of her brother in-law and wrote him the following extraordinary

those whose murder she contrived, loved her and spoke as witnesses for her at the bar of history. The people, however, hated her. Wherefore, facing this portrait of her in the Prometheus Room, we remain uncertain. . . .

Leaving the Palais Pitti and wandering through the city we will go and look at the scene of the drama. It has not changed. The stones are there, everything remains in its place, as though the *prima donna* had only just left the stage. In an idle stroll we can follow the road taken by Pietro Bonaventuri on the night when he was killed as he left the Strozzi Palace to go home. It is quite short. We reach the Pont Santa Trinita,

letter, since discovered by Armand Baschet in the *Archivio centrale di Stato*, at Florence

*"Most Illustrious and Reverend Monseigneur, my Most Honour'd Brother-in-law,*

Signor Prospero, whether actuated by his desire to see this House prosper in all things or whether convinced by what he had heard that I was 'enceinte,' was a little too forward in notifying Your Most Illustrious Lordship of my condition. But I would not wish the pleasure which you have expressed to be upset in case things turn out differently from what is now the general opinion. In actual fact, although they have noticed and still find in me all the symptoms of pregnancy, except that I do not feel the movement of the child—which by the way has now grown large—this the most certain sign of all being lacking, I cannot but be anxious, or speak of it without expressing doubt. And it was in such wise that I spoke to the aforesaid Signor so that he should pass the information on to you, keeping to my own words, and so that he should invite you to my lying-in, if God should grant me that blessing, I being persuaded that your very agreeable presence would not only alleviate all my pains but would still further augment for me, however great it might already be, the satisfaction that everyone would have in such an event. I gave Signor Prospero strict orders to tell you all this on my behalf and, whatever he may actually have said, I greatly appreciated the expressions of your satisfaction and your prompt determination to con-

and at almost any time of the year, at the corner of the parapet which Mr Henry Holiday chose for his famous picture of the meeting place of Dante and Beatrice, we will find flower merchants with their baskets round the statue of *Summer*, with its corresponding basket in stone. The sun streams down behind the old black houses of the Borgo San Jacopo, the murmur of the crowd is like that of a pigeon-house, the shoes of ponies harnessed to their frail carts rattle madly on the flag-stones, there is not the least suggestion of tragedy.

On the other side of the bridge, in the little square where the assassins made their attack, the scene is even more crowded and cheerful

a  
gratulate me in such happy circumstances Not that this was in any way new to me, for I know how many reasons you have for wishing there to be an heir to this House and above all that he should be born of me, who am so much your devoted servant that my heart melts to you in my profound gratitude for the love you bear me If, then through Our Lord's blessing, things turn out well, although they are not happening as they did with me before in similar circumstances, and although I do not feel the movement of the child as pregnant women usually do, then I suppose my time will be about the middle of December But if it should be otherwise—and I am obliged to have my doubts, for the reasons which I have just mentioned and also because fresh pains in my body and groms have kept me in terrible agony for four days and might bring on a miscarriage—one of the greatest regrets I should have would be to think of the grief which I know Your Most Illustrious Lordship would experience at such disappointment. To-day God be praised, I am fairly well. I will keep you informed of all that happens to me, begging you meanwhile to offer prayers for my preservation and to regale yourself with some plums which I am sending herewith as I am sure that since they are now out of season they will be particularly welcome.

The Very Affectionate Sister in Law and Servant  
of

Your Most Illustrious and Reverend Lordship

GRAND DUCHESSE OF FLORENCE "

Florence, 27 September 1586

chestnut-seller is uncovering his smoking wares, mules, harnessed to light carts, painted scarlet and full of *fiaschi* of wine, known as *scelti*, are shaking their red pompoms and white plumes ; a carter is watering his horse at an exquisite weather-beaten marble basin, as indifferent to the fact that it is a masterpiece as is the beast who is plunging his nostrils into it ; hawkers are holding up almond branches in flower which look like lighted candelabra ; a motor-car glides down the narrow street and throws its blue smoke over the Cappello Palace, carrying with it on its way perhaps the same passions which dwelt there hitherto. Everything in the eternal smile of Florence combines to make us forget her tragic moments. History is powerless to counteract our impression of Nature and Art. Lampoons, *diarii*, archives, diplomatic correspondence full of crimes cannot hold their own against the delightful pictures of Florentine life which Ghirlandajo, Botticelli and Filippo Lippi have left for us. Are these documents the truth, the whole truth ? Are these pictures no more than lies ? Who can say ?

In front of us, in the ancient convent known as the *Barbetti*, now no longer a religious house but devoted to feminine education, young girls pass in and out. In this "secondary school" they are given the usual modern education. They will learn all that is happening and has happened for thousands of years in this great world of ours. They will be taught physics, chemistry, the effects of "rays" which are known by every letter in the

alphabet. They will learn the succession of all the Pharaohs who reigned in Egypt, why earthquakes come and when Halley's comet will return—for we are told that henceforth history is to be a science, and that with "good methods" mistakes cannot be made. But they will never know whether or not, here under the very windows of their school, on the very stones upon which their heels tap every day, Bianca Cappello's husband was murdered at her own instigation

PLATE IX



PORTRAIT OF ISABELLA D'ESTE, MARCHIONESS OF MANTUA

Drawing by Leonardo da Vinci, in the Louvre

To face p 143

*ISABELLA D'ESTE  
AND HER ALLEGORIES  
IN THE LOUVRE*

Portraits of Isabella d'Este, wife of Gian Francesco Gonzaga, Fourth Marquis of Mantua

Authentic 1st Charcoal drawing, set off by colour, by Leonardo da Vinci, done in 1499, representing Isabella d'Este at about the age of twenty-five, right profile, No 390 in the room in the Louvre containing Leonardo da Vinci's drawings

2nd Medal by Cristoforo Romano, struck in 1498, representing Isabella d'Este at the age of twenty-four, with the inscription *Isabella, Esten, March Man*

3rd Wedding medal of Gian Francesco Gonzaga and Isabella d'Este, both in left profile

4th Oil painting by Titian, painted in 1536 after a portrait done from imagination by Francia (and now lost) twenty-five years earlier—in the Vienna Museum

5th Oil painting by Rubens, after a portrait done from the life by Titian (now lost) in the Vienna Museum

6th Oil painting identical with the above (No 5) which would be the original of the Titian copied by Rubens—acquired by the Goldschmidt Collection in 1903

Presumed portraits, with grounds for the supposition —

1st Drawing in red chalk, said to be a portrait of Isabella d'Este, in right profile, in the Uffizi

2nd Figure of a woman, in right profile, with her hands crossed, in the left of the picture called *Beata Osanna* by Bonsignori in Mantua

3rd The central figure, full-face, in the Dance of the Muses in the *Parnassus* by Mantegna in the Louvre, and the design made for this figure, at Munich

Presumed portraits, without grounds for the supposition —

1st The central figure, standing with head bent, and the seated figure holding a lamb in the *Court of Isabella d'Este*, by Lorenzo Costa, in the Louvre

2nd Figure of a woman resembling the portrait of Isabella d'Este by Leonardo da Vinci, attributed to Beltraffio (Alfred Morrison Collection).

*ISABELLA D'ESTE  
AND HER ALLEGORIES  
IN THE LOUVRE*

DO YOU KNOW THE ROOM in which Leonardo da Vinci's drawings are kept? Of all the rooms which the sightseer hurries through, there are few which inspire in him a greater dread of losing his way for ever than this one. For it is far away from the paintings in heavy gilt frames which rejoice his eyes with recognizable and showy subjects. Here he is always alone, and does not know which way to go to get back to the crowd. Thus it often happens that even on a holiday this out-of-the-way room remains empty, and that the stray seeker after adventures turns back from it as soon as he has entered it, simply because he feels himself to be alone. But he has not looked carefully. He is not alone here. The faces drawn by Leonardo four hundred years ago are attractive enough for anyone who likes to read the message of eyes and lips, and in the middle, in the place of honour, is a woman's profile interesting enough to provide him with a whole day's thought, just as the woman herself gave her own century food for thought. For this is Isabella d'Este.

It is a trifle in charcoal, with very faint traces

of colour, and shading as soft and smoky as though breathed on to a sheet of paper. All round the profile one can see pin-pricks, which prove that this is a *maschio* or a stereotype plate: for surely no one would have so damaged the original except to transfer it to other sheets of paper by this primitive method. It is, then, no replica but the original, done from the life. Its vitality, in fact, catches the eye at once and guarantees the likeness. The figure is placed almost full-face, with the right shoulder a little forward, but the head is turned so as to be in exact right profile, and this slight contrast is enough to give the idea of a vivacious, versatile personality. The high and slightly convex forehead clearly indicates that commonsense is a predominant feature: it is the forehead of the ideal housekeeper, with a positive, practical, well-ordered mind. The straight nose is rather long, and consequently, according to the æsthetic of the time, beautiful: it droops, almost imperceptibly, and seems to be sniffing—which, combined with the thin lips, suggests a gourmet's sensuousness. The chin, firm without being too prominent, well upholds the promise of the forehead—a decisive and tenacious will. The arms are crossed modestly, as are those of *La Gioconda*, with the forefinger of the right hand stretched along the left arm. The long, nervous hand is of the kind which enjoys testing the quality of bronze, ivory, silk and furs.

This is the pose extolled by Leonardo da Vinci

in his chapter on *How Women should be Painted* And he has observed another of his own precepts here, too "Avoid contemporary fashions as far as possible." The corsage, cut very low and with plain, vertical stripes, the full, soft sleeves, the way the hair is dressed—falling in one thick wave from forehead to shoulders—do not belong to one period more than to another, and one would be hard put to it to date them The history of costume can be best studied in mediocre portraits—and this is an exceptionally good one. Nor does it give us any help in studying the history of jewels, for there are no jewels visible. It is simply a portrait as conceived by a great painter Neither vanity nor fashion has set its stamp upon it. But looking closely one can see a supplementary coiffure marked out in pin-pricks round the charcoal drawing a lace veil encircles the curve of the forehead and is raised above the eyebrows like the vizor of a morion after the fashion then in vogue amongst noble Mantuan ladies *un velo al quale fanno fare una bella punta nella fronte*, says Vecellio—a widow's veil, perhaps, added to the portrait at a later date. But all this in no way detracts from the simplicity of the outline. The portrait is certainly by Leonardo

And it is a likeness, which is a very rare thing, but one which here one cannot question Of all the portraits of Isabella d'Este, this one, just as it is the only one which is "alive," is also the only one which distinctly recalls the profile in the medal

of her by Cristoforo Romano. Lorenzo da Pavia, who knew her well and who was more of an art connoisseur than he was a man of the world, wrote thus to her on 13 March 1500 :

Leonardo da Vinci is in Venice and has shown me a portrait of Your Highness which is a perfect likeness, and so well executed that it could not be better.<sup>1</sup>

Here, then, is a guarantee of the likeness of this drawing, which was used as though it were a photographic plate and from which copies were taken.<sup>2</sup> It is certainly the *Maschio* of Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua. But what was her face like ?

There is none more worthy of being deciphered. Sister-in-law of Lucrezia Borgia and of Ludovic the Moor, wife of Francesco Gonzaga, the hero of Fornovo, aunt of the Constable of Bourbon, who captured Rome—without her the Renaissance could hardly have come about, and in the chequered history of the XVth and XVIth centuries in Italy the golden thread of her career runs everywhere. From 1490, the date of her marriage, to 1539, the date of her death, she was the most conspicuous figure in all Italy, and one towards which every scholar and every foreign king turned

<sup>1</sup> " E l'e Venecia Leonardo Vinci el quale m'a mostrato uno retrato de la S V. che è molto naturale a quella Sta tanto bene fato, non è possibile melio "

<sup>2</sup> On the 7 March, 1504, she wrote to Fra Pietro da Novellara, who was preaching during Lent at Santa Croce in Florence " If Leonardo, the Florentine painter, is in Florence we beg you to tell us how he is spending his time . Will you ask him to send us another copy of our portrait (*un altro schizzo del retrato nostro*) because our Illustrious Lord has given away the one he left here."

in order to understand the genius of the race and of the country What la Bella Simonetta, a quarter of a century earlier, had promised to the world, Isabella d'Este fulfilled for it. She personified the Renaissance, triumphantly accomplished she represented the splendour and the flavour of its ripe fruition She had several of la Bella Simonetta's characteristics graciousness and the gift of sympathy, friends by the thousand and no enemies, a universal curiosity and zest, the art of summing up an age in a gesture and a philosophy in a word, an expression which forewarned artists that they had found a model and which persuaded philosophers that they had won a disciple—and, finally, a beauty which excused everything But she had, besides, a perfect admixture of bodily health and mental powers, which enabled her to make a definite picture of what, in Simonetta, was only a prophetic sketch She lived a long time, and she laid foundations—which Botticelli's nymph was unable to do and perhaps would not have known how to do She made herself love her husband She had children and perpetuated herself in them. In the fine book which Julia Cartwright has devoted to her—a model of detailed, comprehensive biography, and the only book, moreover, which we possess on *la prima donna del mondo*—the author is in truth justified in saying that we have in her "a complete feminine nature" :

\* Many researches have been made into the subject of Isabella d'Este, amongst which the following must be mentioned Those of MM Luzio

Finally, she was the inspirer and the legitimate owner of a quantity of famous works of art which are now in the Louvre and which we admire without realizing that we owe them to her : *The Parnassus*, *Wisdom Victorious over the Vices*, and *The Madonna of Victory*, by Mantegna ; the *Fight between Love and Chastity*, by Perugino ; the *Triumph of Poetry*, by Costa. We owe them to her twice over. For not only did she pay for them, but she ordered them. She also possessed Titian's *Entombment* and Correggio's *Antiope*. If all those who loved her were present together, what a crowd there would be ! And if those who acclaimed her, what applause ! They would come if we chose to call them. They are wandering in our memories seeking a fixed spot upon which to fasten themselves. The dead are more easily united than the living, perhaps : they have forgotten their quarrels, they are less particular on the question of precedence. This little room in the Louvre suffices for them, for ghosts take up but little space. Further south, in Mantua, the vast palace where she lived, empty and desolate nowadays, would offer them no better refuge. They

and Rénier, who have between them exhausted most aspects of the subject , those of M Pedrazzoli, of M Braghironi, of M Ferrato, of M Stefano Davari , of Armand Baschet into the Archives of Mantua, *Gazette de Beaux-Arts* (1886) and *Archivio storico italiano* (1886) and of Charles Yriarte, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1888, 1895 and 1896) But it is to an English author that we owe the only work so far published dealing solely with Isabella d'Este, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua* (1474-1539), a study of the Renaissance, by Julia Cartwright (Mrs Ady), 2 vols , London, 1903, recently translated into French by Mme Schlumberger (Hachette et Cie, 1912)

would discover scarcely anything of her there  
But they will find her here together with those  
idealized faces which she created and those reflec-  
tions of her elegances which the Mincio has failed  
to retain in the mirror of its bright, sluggish,  
pestilential waters

*THE LIFE SHE HAD TO LEAD*

EVERY WOMAN lives three lives : the life she has to lead, the life she chooses to lead and the life she dreams of leading—in other words, the things she does in spite of the fact that she dislikes doing them, the things she does because she enjoys doing them and the things she would like to do but does not, either because she cannot or because, though she would like to do them, she has the requisite will-power to say no. When the woman in question was one who planned the decoration of her own home according to her own wishes, who had legions of artists at her beck and call, and who prompted their masterpieces we can easily imagine what kind of life she dreamed of living. But this dream, or ideal, would sometimes be quite unintelligible if we did not know for what it was a compensation, from what necessity or from what reality it freed her—what, in a word, was “the life she had to lead.” In the case of Isabella d’Este, this latter is none too well known, and is quite eclipsed by her other life—a very erroneous idea of which is usually suggested by the first pilgrimage one makes to her palace at Mantua.

The pilgrimage, moreover, is made by too few people. It is not easy to say why this quaint

town which is so wrapped up in the past, which has such an austere quaintness all its own, and which, in addition, contains the admirable *Sala degli Sposi*, is not more frequently visited. Perhaps it is because its reputation for malaria still clings to it.<sup>1</sup> At long intervals a motor-car speeds like a bullet across the Mantuan marshes, as if afraid of microbes, and pulls up in the ancient *Place Sordello*. Elegantly dressed ladies, shrouded in veils and stuffed with quinine, step hurriedly out of the car, walk quickly away and are at once lost to sight in the immense interior of the deserted palace. Silence, solitude, the sun and the emptiness of the place take hold of them and absorb them. When after innumerable twists and turns within this jumble of dilapidated buildings, under chandeliers which are reflected in the mirrors as in still water and under friezes projecting beyond ruined statues, after passing the perpendiculars of red brick dropping sheer into the green waters of the moat, these lady visitors arrive at the rooms, or cells really, which were Isabella d'Este's—so tiny, so peaceful, so far away from everything, so daintily lighted, with the lake stretching everywhere as far as the eye can see, a dazzling line of water reaching to the horizon—they feel themselves to be in the kingdom of Immobility and Unconsciousness, and imagine that life here was lived without gloom or shock—that it was, in fact, a little boring, as one imagines Paradise to be. Because they have come here in a car, because they

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Karl Baedeker *Northern Italy* Leipzig, 1913 pp. xxi and 314.

have read, that very morning, in the latest edition of the newspaper, about some strike or some drama of passion, because they have joined two or three different societies that day, have paid three other visits before coming here and mean to have tea thirty miles or so farther on, they imagine, sincerely enough, that they are living in a troubled age and leading an “intense life.”

But the woman who used to dream beneath these blue and gold caissons and pass through this low doorway with its veneer of many-coloured marble, experienced more difficult times, and her nerves were subjected to rougher tests. No doubt the remains of designs on the walls of the little room—violas, virginals, music scores, with their mysterious notes inlaid in precious wood—suggest the peaceful life of the dilettante and unusual dreams. But to realize how unusual they were we must picture to ourselves the kind of world in which this little artificial world managed to exist and from what tempests this *Paradiso* was the refuge.

We must remember that society in Italy in the XVIth century was the most cruel that the world had produced for hundreds of years; that the upheavals which stirred it were more sudden, more unforeseen and more violent than any which had been experienced for a long time; that its alliances were of the most ephemeral kind, and its morrows most uncertain. A virtuoso playing the violin in a cage of wild beasts—it is thus that we should first of all picture Isabella d’Este. Through her brother, she was a sister-in-law of Lucrezia

Borgia and, through her sister, of Ludovic the Moor. She was a sister of Alfonso d'Este. Thus she lived amongst the foxes and the wolves of the Renaissance—among its tigers, even—and she tamed them. Before she could be anything else—before she could be a humanist, a musician, a Mæcenas, a collector or a traveller, she had first of all, and above all else, to be a tamer of wild beasts.

She tamed many different kinds. First came her husband. She was married before she was sixteen to a blackamoor of exceptional ugliness—not the shy kind of ugliness which suggests a lapse in type and a lowered vitality, but the exuberant, impetuous type which astonishes rather than alienates and sometimes even attracts through its power of suggesting a prodigious strangeness. Flat-nosed, round-faced, thick-lipped, woolly-haired, wide-mouthed, with rolling white eyes and a negro's physiognomy under a thatch of hair like a yak's coat, Francesco Gonzaga might have posed to the life as a dog-man—provided one was prepared to assume the existence of negro dog-men and ill-informed tourists visiting museums in Italy and vaguely aware that a certain Ludovic the Moor lived at this time, think that "Moor," in this connection, means "African," and never fail to apply the name to every portrait of Francesco Gonzaga which they see.

He had no negro blood in him, however. He was the son of Margaret of Bavaria and the grandson of Barbara of Brandenburg—but who can penetrate the secrets of heredity? It would be

hard to find a more ferocious mask in the whole of history, though we scarcely suspect the fact when we are looking at the kneeling knight in full armour in Mantegna's picture, *The Madonna of Victory*, which is in the middle of the great gallery overlooking the river, in the Louvre. For this is Isabella d'Este's husband. The portrait strongly resembles him, but in it he is seen from a softened point of view, idealized and taken at a moment of delight and ecstasy. To be more certain of his features, we must look at the medals of him, and above all at a certain large bust, attributed to Sperandio, which is in Mantua but which is carefully tucked away on the ground floor of the *Museo Patrio* in a small lumber-room with windows facing the *Place Dante*. This head, which is a masterpiece, and the extraordinary likeness of which is vouched for by his extraordinary life, is more like a Japanese mask, designed to terrify the enemy, than a natural product of the white race. Once out of his armour, the Marquis Gonzaga wears that expression of ferocious joy which one may suppose he wore on the eve of Fornovo, on which day he paid ten ducats for the first French head cut off by his stradiots and kissed the lips of the man who brought it to him.

But such as he was, Isabella d'Este loved him—and him only. But she also loved ideas, and of these, outside hunting and horses, her husband does not appear to have had many. When people went to see him they found him lying on a gorgeous couch with three pages armed with fly-





FR. GONZAGA.IV.

BUST OF FRANCESCO GONZAGA, MARQUIS OF MANTUA  
Isabella d'Este's husband In the Museo Patrio, Mantua

flappers at his head, three greyhounds and a dwarf clad in gold at his feet and a whole council of chained hawks and falcons in grave assembly near him All round the walls were portraits of his horses and hounds. He took great pride in his stud, which produced a breed of Barbary horse that was the envy of every Court. His stables, situated on the site now occupied by the *T* palace, contained a hundred and fifty superb chargers, no races took place in Italy in which his colours were not in evidence, and few in which they were not successful Thus he had a wide domain for his own triumphs without in any way encroaching on that of Isabella d'Este Where she reigned he never ventured, nor, since his kingdom was elsewhere, needed to venture. She was no mere reflection of him, nor did she overshadow him Neither his absence nor his presence lessened her prestige. He had married her for political reasons, he became attached to her through love and he remained bound to her by interest. He did not understand his wife, but he realized that he did not understand her—which is a good deal for a husband—and since he was told that she was a superior being by persons whom he considered superior to himself—the King of France, the Doge and the Pope, for instance—he ended by being as proud of her as he was of his stable—or even prouder

But his education was not completed in a day It often happened that his gibes warned the lion-tamer that she would have to use a certain amount

of tact to lead the wild beast along her chosen path. The first controversial subject, soon discovered, was the question of the children. She was urging them in the direction of literary study, and was overjoyed when she saw her son Federico, from his childhood, taking a part with his little friends in the comedies of Apuleius under the tutelage of Francesco Vigilio, the humanist. It chanced one day that, writing to her husband, she gave him an account of the boy's successes : his brutal answer was to the effect that he took no interest in his son's literary knowledge, that he had no use for the tutor she had selected, and that he soon meant to take the lad into his own hands and "make a man of him." Thus he made it harder for his wife to achieve her ideal : but he did not, however, in any way prevent her.

Another subject of household dissension was her jewels. Times were hard : the plains of Lombardy were too often devastated by hail-storms and epidemics and the passage of armies to allow the little Court much luxury. There came a day when the Marquis wanted to make his brother Sigismund a cardinal—the Sigismund whom we see as a child, clad in white, giving his hand to the protonotary in the *Sala degli Sposi* at Mantua. To do so he required 7,000 ducats. Where was he to obtain them ? Without the slightest compunction he asked his wife to pledge her last remaining jewels. Instead, she sent him this answer :

I am, I need hardly say, always ready to obey Your Excellency's orders, but you have perhaps forgotten that most of my jewels

are already in pawn in Venice—not only those which you yourself gave me but also those which I brought to Mantua as part of my dowry and those which I have purchased since my marriage. I mention this, not in order to establish a distinction between your possessions and mine, but to show you that I have already given everything. I have only four jewels left—the large ruby which you presented to me when my first child was born, the large diamond which is my favourite, and the other two which you gave me. If I pawn these I shall have nothing left and I see myself being obliged to wear black, for I should look ridiculous dressed in coloured silk and brocade and without jewels. Your Excellency will understand that my one thought, at this moment, is for your honour and my own. It is for this reason that I beg and entreat you not to deprive me of these few ornaments I would rather dispense with my *camera* embroidered with small stones than part with all my jewels. Before doing so, therefore, I will await Your Excellency's reply

MANTUA, 27 August, 1496

That, however, was nothing. The Marquis had much more disagreeable whims than that, but his young wife took account of them only when there was some chance of curbing them without a fuss. Calculating in advance the concessions which he *could* make, she made no mention of the rest and set herself to ignore the inevitable with a show of dignity. A few years after his marriage Francesco Gonzaga became infatuated with a certain Theodora, who became his mistress, and by whom he had two daughters. He produced her, in full gala dress, at a tournament given at Brescia in honour of the Queen of Cyprus, with all Italy looking at her and knowing who she was. Isabella alone was unaware of the facts. Nearly ten years afterwards she was still skirting delicately round controversial subjects, and in her

curious correspondence it is only with difficulty that we can perceive, as though we were looking through the crack of a door, that all was not quite as it should be in her household. In October 1506 the Marquis took the field with Julius II, whom he was helping to reconquer the Romagna. They were about to enter Bologna with much ceremony and in the company of seventy-eight cardinals, and he was worn out. She wrote to him thus :

Your letter of excuses for not having written to me has covered me with confusion, for it is I who should be asking your pardon for my delay. It is not you who are to blame I know that you have scarcely time to eat ! But since you are kind enough to apologize you will, I hope, be equally kind and forgive my delay, which was due to Federico's illness and to my reluctance to send you news which would upset you Now, thank God, he is all right again and I can cheerfully fulfil my duty The hat which you ask for shall be made as soon as ever the master arrives and shall be as fine and smart as possible If you will let me know by what date you will require it I will do my utmost to have a cloak made to go with it, if there is time, but I would like you to tell me at once Thank you for expressing a wish that I should see your entry into Bologna It will be a magnificent sight, I am sure. I am very well and if you would like me to come I will gladly do so I think that even a bomb would have some trouble in making me flinch from coming ! Your Highness ought not to say that it is my fault that I argue with you, for as long as you showed me any love no one could persuade me to the contrary But I need no one's help to see that for some time past Your Excellency has cared very little for me However, since this is a disagreeable subject I will cut it short and say no more about it I am disturbed that Your Highness disagrees with the name I have given to our son Ercole I would not have done so had I known that it would have displeased you But Your Highness knows that when you were at Sacchetta you used to say that he was very like my father, of happy memory, and that I said at the time that, this being so, you might do worse than call him Ercole You began to laugh

and said no more but if you had told me what was in your mind I should not have made this mistake. If I have another son you can call him Alvise or anything else you like—but let this one be Ercole for my sake. But I am sure that if I had a thousand sons I could not expend on any of them the care that I am giving to Federico All the same Your Highness must do as you please and I will do whatever you wish. A few days ago I went to Your Excellency's new house and as I have already told you I thought it very beautiful. You write to say that I am laughing at you—which is not true, for if these rooms were not beautiful I should not have mentioned them. But since the effect seemed to me strikingly beautiful I wrote to tell you so and I repeat now, that they are beautiful and all the more so in my eyes since Your Highness has followed the example of my own rooms, although I must confess, you have improved upon it. I will not worry you further with unimportant matters but I commend myself a thousand times to Your Highness.

By the hand of Isabella, who longs to see you.

MANTUA, 5 October, 1506

We can see in that, clearly enough, how right Floriano Dolfo, the humanist, was when he wrote to the Marquis Gonzaga

You are fortunate above all men in possessing a beautiful, clever and noble-minded wife, who is the essence of discretion and virtue and has proved herself a true mother of peace, always anxious to fulfil your wishes, while at the same time pretending not to see or hear about any deed of yours which might be prejudicial or injurious to her

On the other hand, she was quick to notice and understand the smallest thing which might be prejudicial to her husband When he was away from her she was always nervous on his account, and would shower advice upon him

MY VERY ILLUSTRIOUS LORD,

There is a rumour here, started either by someone's private letters or by word of mouth, through someone coming

from the country where you now are, that Your Excellency spoke ill of the Valentinois (Cæsar Borgia) in the presence of the Most Christian King and some of the Pope's household. Whether it be true or false this rumour will reach the ears of the Valentinois. Since the latter is the sort of man who has no scruple in conspiring against anyone of his own blood, I am certain that he would not hesitate to plot against your person, and since I, for my part, know how careless your good nature makes you, and since I am anxious for your life, which I esteem more than my own, I asked Antonio da Bologna and other knights about your habits. I am told that anyone at all may serve you at table and that Alessandro da Baese has his meals with you and that ordinary valets and pages act as carvers and servers. Thus if anyone wanted to poison Your Lordship, it could be done quite easily, since you are not guarded in any way. For this reason I beg and implore you, if not for your own sake then for mine and for that of our child, to take more care of your person and make Alessandro carry out the duties of your carver with the utmost care. And if Alessandro cannot do it I will send you either Antonio or anyone else Your Excellency would like, for I prefer to run the risk of making you angry with me rather than that my child and I should mourn you together.

And in a postscript, in the handwriting of the Marchioness :

My Lord, let Your Lordship not laugh at this letter of mine, nor say that women are cowards and are always afraid, for the wickedness of these people is much greater than my fears and Your Lordship's courage . . .

Isabella, who longs to see Your Lordship,  
By her own hand

MANTUA, 23 July, 1502

In spite of these protests the Marquis Gonzaga continued to be rash, for he was brave and was about the only man of his time who took war seriously. But his recklessness involved him in a very unpleasant adventure. One day, when he was fighting against the Venetians, after having been

their Captain-General for a long time, he was surprised in a farm, near Legnago, and had only just time to jump through a window, and hide, unarmed, in a field of maize, where he was surrounded and eventually forced to surrender. He was taken in triumph to Venice, and imprisoned in the safest cell that could be found for him in the Doge's palace. New bars were put in to make certain of his security.

Then came the question of obtaining his release. Isabella moved Heaven and earth—that is to say, the spiritual and the temporal. But both of them turned a deaf ear and no one seemed very anxious to see the wild beast spring out of the cage into which the Venetians had put him. He inspired confidence in no one for since he had fought under so many different banners and betrayed almost as many of them as he had defended, no one knew for certain whether, in rescuing him, he was going to rescue a friend or an opponent. So much so, indeed, that Louis XII and Maximilian retorted to the importunities of the great Marchioness that before they would undertake anything, she would have to put her son Federico in their hands as a hostage to answer for his father. Her son as hostage! A she-wolf deprived of her cub could not have howled more furiously than did Isabella d'Este at such an idea.

As for the project regarding our eldest son Federico, besides the fact that it is a cruel and almost unhuman thing to do, as anyone who understands a mother's love would know, there are many reasons which make it difficult and impossible. Although we are quite sure that his person would be safe and that he would

be protected by Your Majesty, yet how can we allow him to run the risk of this long and difficult journey, even setting aside the child's tender and delicate age? And surely you must realize what a comfort and consolation, with his father in such an unfortunate position, we derive from the presence of this dear son, who is the hope and joy of all our people and our subjects. To deprive us of him would be to deprive us of life itself and of all that we hold good and precious. If you take Federico away from us, then take away our life and our possessions at the same time! Thus you may answer frankly, once and for all, that we will suffer anything rather than be deprived of our son and you may take this as our considered and unbreakable resolution.

She gained her end eventually, but the man whose release from prison she obtained was no longer the lissome knight who kneels before *The Madonna of Victory* in the Louvre. A year's captivity had made him weak and disabled and thin. He needed her constantly, and moaned whenever she escaped from the gloomy *Castello* in Mantua where she was always so desperately bored. At the beginning of the year 1513 the great Marchioness was at Milan, with her nephew, Duke Maximilian, and in process of amusing herself recklessly in unravelling numberless diplomatic skeins. She started new fashions and new projects of alliance. When she was complimented on her dress, she laid claim to a fortress.

The representatives of Germany and Spain, Cardinal de Gurk and the Viceroy of Naples, were there, both of them madly in love with one of her ladies-in-waiting, la Brognina—a fact of which she took advantage by pushing forward the affairs of her husband and her brother. She danced and she carried on negotiations. The Marquis,

for his part, remained in Mantua, ill and fretful he did not dance and he did not experience any great benefit from all these negotiations On the other hand, he learnt that there was a great deal of talk in Milan about the coquettices of la Brognina His ill-humour seized on this, and becoming enraged, he ordered his wife to return She, naturally enough, did no such thing , and instead of the beautiful Marchioness, the following letter arrived for him

MY DEAR LORD,

I am grieved, but scarcely surprised, to hear that my explanation has not satisfied you, and I would be still more grieved if I felt that it was my fault rather than my misfortune—*as it is*. But since the reason that I did not at once obey Your Excellency was that, with your own permission, I wanted to help my brother and please my nephew, it seems to me that you ought not to express so much discontent, and I cannot but deplore the ill-chance which always makes my actions displeasing in your eyes. I certainly cannot think of anything which I have done during my stay at Milan which merits my becoming the talk of the town. All I know is that you have gained many new friends, for your own good as well as mine, and that I have behaved *as I should and as I always do*, for, thanks to God and myself, I have never found it necessary either to be guided by other people or to be told how I should regulate my own actions. And although in other ways I may count for nothing God has bestowed this blessing upon me, for which Your Excellency ought to be *as grateful to me as any husband could be to his wife*, and even if you loved and honoured me *as much as it is possible to do*, you will never be able to pay too much for my fidelity It is this which makes you say sometimes that I am proud, because, knowing how much I deserve from you and the little I receive I am tempted, at certain moments, to change my nature and appear different from what I am. But even if you should treat me ill I shall never cease to do what is for the best and the less love you show for me the more I shall always love you, because, indeed,

this love of mine is a part of myself and I was so young when I became your wife that I cannot remember ever existing without it. This being so I think that, for the reasons I have already given, I should be allowed to postpone my return for a fortnight, without incurring your displeasure. Do not be angry with me and do not say that you do not believe that I want to see you, as I have stated in my letters, for if my wishes on this point were fulfilled you would let me see you much more often than I do in Mantua. I commend myself once more to Your Excellency and I ask your pardon for so long a letter. From one who loves you more than she loves herself,

ISABELLA, MARCHIONESS OF MANTUA

PLAISANCE, 12 March, 1513

We may doubt if a less clever woman would ever have mastered the terrible *Condottiere*. But beneath his rough exterior he was acute enough to realize the prestige and the power which Isabella d'Este brought to his little State. When he felt his end approaching he admitted this openly, singing the great Marchioness's praises to his son Federico and declaring that he had always found in her "a marvellous genius, capable of any undertaking, however important." Isabella d'Este had tamed her husband.

Now for her brothers. The d'Este family, as lords of Ferrara and of princely rank, consisted of legitimate and illegitimate children, the latter receiving almost as much consideration as the former, and being very often more gifted and more attractive. Such, at least, was the opinion of the beautiful Angela Borgia, a follower and a relation of Lucrezia, who, being wooed at the same time by Cardinal Ippolito d'Este and by his natural brother Giulio, was one day thoughtless enough

to tell Ippolito that she would willingly exchange him—the whole of him from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet—just for the eyes of Giulio. It took no more than that, in those days, to make a cardinal a criminal. A few days after this madrigal, when Giulio was returning from hunting at Belriguardo, with the gallant following which we can see in the Schifanoia frescoes at Ferrara, he was attacked by a party of *bravi*, thrown from his horse and pinioned. Then, in front of the Cardinal, who watched the operation, his eyes were gouged out of their sockets with the sharp point of a sword.

History does not tell us whether the beautiful Angela Borgia loved Ippolito any better on account of this, but it is certain that the head of the family, Duke Alfonso d'Este, did not take an excessively strict view of the matter. He sent Ippolito away for some time for the sake of formality, and then allowed him to return to Court. It must be added, also, that thanks to some miracle of surgery, one at least of Giulio's eyes was replaced, so that he did not lose his sight entirely. Niccolo da Correggio, the humanist, who was a relation of theirs, intervened and a sort of reconciliation took place. But it could not last long. Giulio could not forgive his elder brother for having denied him justice, nor the other for his lost beauty. There was a third brother there, Ferrante, a dull-witted and dissatisfied man, embittered by the part he had to play at Ferrara and filled with contempt for the Duke, in whom he saw only the good qual-

ties of a blacksmith, an artilleryman or a potter. He and Giulio plotted to kill Alfonso and Ippolito with the help of two nobles, a certain Boschetti and a certain Roberti. They were joined by one of Ferrante's servants named Boccaccio, and a musician singer-in-ordinary to the Duke, named Gianni.

The plan was to strike down Duke Alfonso and Cardinal Ippolito and to seize power—which, in the normal course of events, would devolve upon Ferrante. But who should be struck down first? Giulio wanted it to be the Cardinal, Ferrante the Duke. They argued, procrastinated, waited. But vital secrets do not remain long in the soul without showing themselves in the face. The Cardinal guessed the conspirators' secret. Boschetti and Boccaccio, arrested at once and put to the torture, confessed and denounced the two princes. Ferrante thought he could trust himself to his brother's clemency. He threw himself at the latter's feet and repented of his crime: but he had not reckoned with the violent blood of the d'Este. Alfonso at that moment held a stick in his hand. He struck his suppliant brother a savage blow in the face and half blinded him with blood. Giulio, who was not so simple-minded, fled to his half-sister, Isabella d'Este, in Mantua as soon as the plot was discovered. Imagine the lovely humanist, in her *Grotta*, busy examining her latest presents from Aldo Manugio or recounting some "story" for the brush of Bellini, being suddenly informed of the arrival of her brother, who carried on his face the marks

of the cruelty of another brother and knowing that she would have to try and save him from the scaffold !

It was a hopeless undertaking Alfonso, hearing whither the culprit had fled, demanded that he should be handed over, for reasons of State. Isabella held out for a long time Lengthy epistles were sent off to Ferrara addressed to Niccolo da Correggio, who was acting as intermediary between the two Courts. She put as much obstinacy into her attempt to save her brother's head as she did to procure some antique bust—but it was a more difficult matter

"The people of Ferrara is a people of iron," the worthy Joachim du Bellay was still saying, fifty years later Of what hard, unfeeling metal was it not made in the time of Alfonso d Este !

Niccolo da Correggio soon arrived in Mantua with his hands full of proofs of guilt. Isabella yielded and handed over her brother Giulio was brought back to Ferrara, the trial of the conspirators followed, and their execution was ordered First of all Boccaccio and Roberti were beheaded in the courtyard of the Ragione Palace—the old palace, now destroyed, whose sinister, dove-tailed battlements at that time pointed to the sky Their heads were set up on the Torre de' Ribelli and their limbs served to adorn various gateways of the city Then, with great ceremony, the two princes were led into the middle of the Ducal Palace courtyard, where ambassadors and important personages had been assembled and placed in

tiers according to their rank, with that attention to form and appreciation of *décor* which characterized all the fêtes organized by Alfonso d'Este. When they appeared, each bearing on his face the marks of fraternal cruelty, between penitents carrying a tall cross and a Confessor holding a crucifix, and faced the executioner, axe in hand with his apron hanging between his legs and the usher reading the sentence, the crowd, accustomed though it was to such spectacles, was deeply moved. And this was the precise moment at which Alfonso d'Este, up till then concealed behind a window, chose to appear and give the carefully prepared drama an unexpected dénouement. He was graciously pleased to commute the sentence of death pronounced on his brothers to imprisonment for life—which was considered a fine gesture of family magnanimity.

In those times “for life” meant a very long time. It lasted for ever for Ferrante, who died in his cell, thirty-four years later, without a single day of his captivity having been remitted. It lasted more than half a century for Giulio. He was twenty-five when he was taken down into the deep moat below the dungeon of Ferrara. He was eighty when at last he obtained his pardon. The well-made garments of those days, which had scarcely become worn out in his prison, still hung on him : they were those of his early youth, and the people of Ferrara were amazed to see an old man shuffling along the streets dressed as a beau might have been fifty years previously.

During that time whole generations had passed on, and no one could tell what the brilliant lover of Angela Borgia had once looked like. Fêtes without number had taken place in the d'Este Palace, and above the underground cells where the two brothers lay, all the rest of the family had danced, acted in comedies and discussed the most subtle problems in æsthetics, philosophy and ethics.

When we visit Ferrara, amongst the medley of stone-work, pulled down, rebuilt and built over, which makes up the d'Este Palace, the only thing perhaps which we find intact, a pitiless witness of those first years of the XVIth century, is the black hole under the dungeon into which the two brothers were put in 1506, and which, it appears, was underneath the cells where Ugo and Parisina were confined. The only alteration has been to put a staircase where there was formerly a ladder. We can still see the spot where the two princes languished—living symbols of everything that was brutal and inhuman in the very foundations of that festival for the eye and the mind which we call the Renaissance. Nevertheless, they lived. It is very probable that after some time they were removed to another part of the dungeon; their exceptional longevity suggests that they did not endure harsh treatment, and though there is nothing to prove it, everything points to the fact that they owed the scrap of life which was left to them to Isabella d'Este.

She did not obtain so much for all those who were dear to her. When she returned to Ferrara

in 1508 she found the Court deprived not only of her two brothers Giulio and Ferrante, but also of her relation and friend, the humanist, Niccolo da Correggio, and the poet, Ercole Strozzi. The former had died of a mysterious illness, after having displeased Alfonso d'Este. The latter had been found, one fine morning, with twenty-two dagger wounds in his body, at the corner of the Via Praisolo, near his own house and beneath a high wall which can be seen to-day a few yards from the convent where legend has it that Alfonso d'Este and Lucrezia Borgia lie. Funeral orations, epitaphs, and the sympathy of princes—nothing, except vengeance, was lacking to the hapless poet. Stricken with grief though she was, Isabella did not make inquiries into the circumstances of his death. It was not for her to know what it was nobody's business, moreover, to tell her : that Alfonso d'Este was in love with Strozzi's young wife, the beautiful Barbara Torelli, and that the beautiful Barbara had declined to be unfaithful. And for that reason she had waited in vain one morning, with her newly-born son in her arms, for the gentle poet who never returned to her. . . .

Such was the brother of the great Marchioness, the man whom she endeavoured all her life to guide, if not towards good, at least towards what was least evil : such was Alfonso d'Este, the astonishing expert in artillery who used to forge his cannons out of Michael Angelo's statues.

He was not really very different from the majority of the princes of his own day. Ludovic

the Moor, her brother-in-law, had a more cultivated taste in the arts, and more courteous manners, but he was strongly suspected of having caused the death of several relations in order to reach the throne. Louis XII, King of France, expressed immense respect and friendship for Isabella, but he kept Ludovic the Moor shut up in a cellar with no light in it in the dungeon of Loches. Later on she had as her son-in-law a charming young man named Francesco Maria della Rovere nevertheless he killed his friend, Giovanni Andrea, after inviting him to dine at his table, and, in the sequel, Cardinal Alidosi, whom he suspected of treason. It was amongst such allies or friends that she was obliged to philosophize, to dream, and to compose music.

Finally there was a last ferocious beast to tame—Cæsar Borgia. One cannot truthfully say that the Marchioness subdued him to the extent of preventing him from attacking everyone round her, but at least she saved Mantua and her husband from his fangs. During the whole of the dangerous period when the Valentinois was at large in Italy she amused him with trifles and words. She chose him as a godfather to her son Federico. He called her "my fellow-godparent" and "my very dear sister." She resigned herself, without open disgust, to the marriage of her brother Alfonso d'Este with Lucrezia Borgia, who had been divorced by one husband, tragically made the widow of another and was accused by public opinion of all the crimes in the Decalogue.

Nowadays one gathers from modern critical works that Lucrezia Borgia was calumniated, but the people of the XVIth century, not having read modern critical works and not having been initiated into "sound historical methods" believed what was commonly talked about in the streets of Rome; and this woman's entry into a family produced in them exactly the same effect as a case of the black plague would have done. Isabella d'Este was very angry for a while, and asked everyone what she could possibly think of her future sister-in-law; but she ended by resigning herself to it, and gave the hussy a pearl necklace which she had inherited from her dearly-loved mother.

For Cæsar, her presents were more peculiar and more delicately symbolic. In the last days of 1502 the bandit was in the Romagna, very busy soliciting the good graces of certain former allies with whom for some time past he had been on bad terms: amongst others the Orsini (Paolo and Francesco, Duke of Gravina), Vitellozzo and Oliverotto, the Tyrant of Fermo. These *condottieri*, rallying to his side, had just captured Sinigaglia for him. He followed close behind them, and as soon as he had arrived at Fano he thanked them for their devotion to his cause and informed them that he wanted to enter the captured town with his own troops, asking them, therefore, to withdraw their garrisons. This they did, posting their infantry in the suburbs and distributing their forces throughout the captured territory.

On the morrow Paolo Orsini, the Duke of

Gravina and Oliverotto appeared before him there followed hand-clasping, embracing, caresses They accompanied him to the gate of the city, where his whole army was in battle array At that point they wished to take leave of him to withdraw to their own quarters, which were outside the town—for they were beginning to think that there was something strange in the column of troops following the Borgia and surrounding them on every side. But he begged them to enter the city where, he said, he wanted to confer with them He rode between Vitellozzo and the Duke of Gravina, chatting and joking and very wide-awake, for, says Guichardin, "he possessed in the highest degree a talent for talk, sustained with much wit and fire" They did not like to persist in refusing to accompany him to the city's palace, although an evil presentiment crossed their minds—quickly dispersed, however, by his conversation Oliverotto remained behind, but Cæsar's evil genius, Micheletto, went back for him and begged him to join the company so that the fête might be even finer So they all went into the palace, already prepared for their reception

After a few minutes' talk Cæsar abruptly left them on a pretext of going to change his clothes Some soldiers entered and seized and bound Vitellozzo and his companions, while their troops were being disarmed outside Next day, after a night of agony, Oliverotto and Vitellozzo were placed back to back on two chairs and strangled

The two Orsini, spared for the moment, were dragged behind Cæsar on his marches, asking each other what he was waiting for before killing them. He was waiting for news from Rome; and when he knew that in Rome, too, matters had gone well and that the Orsini had been rendered powerless to avenge their relatives, he had them both strangled by Micheletto.

On hearing of this exploit Isabella sent Cæsar Borgia a present that was most appropriate to the man and the moment—masks. She did not consider that she ought to offer him less than one hundred of them, taking into account all the parts which he was called upon to play. With them she sent this letter :

Most ILLUSTRIOUS LORD,

Your kind letter informing us of Your Excellency's fortunate success filled us with that joy and pleasure which is the natural result of the friendship and affection which exists between you and ourselves and in the name of Our Illustrious Lord and in our own we congratulate you on having escaped from danger and on your prosperity, and we thank you for having told us of it and also for the promise which you have made to keep us informed of your future successes We hope that you will kindly continue to do so, for loving you as we do we are eager to have constant news of your deeds and exploits so that we may rejoice in your prosperity and take part in your triumphs And, thinking that you will take some rest and recreation after the fatigues and troubles of this glorious expedition, we are sending you a hundred masks, by our servant Giovanni We are well aware that such a poor present is unworthy of you, but it is a pledge that if you can find a present more worthy of your greatness in our country we will be happy to send it to you If these masks are not as fine as they ought to be Your Excellency must blame the artists of Ferrara, for thanks to the law which forbade the wearing of

masks in public—which law has only just been repealed—this branch of the costumer's art has been almost entirely lost. We beg you to accept them as a pledge of our sincere sympathy and affection for Your Excellency

Cæsar Borgia's answer was cold it was as if he was wearing the whole hundred masks on his face at once

Most ILLUSTRIOS AND EXCELLENT MADAM, HONOURED FELLOW GODPARENT AND VERY DEAR SISTER,

We have received Your Excellency's gift of a hundred masks, which pleased us extremely, not only on account of their beauty and their remarkable variety but also because of the moment and the place of their arrival, which could not have been more opportune. It seems, indeed, that Your Excellency foresaw the order of our plan of campaign and of our present journey to Rome. After having taken the city and the province of Sinigaglia with all its fortresses in a single day and justly punished the perfidious treason of our enemies we have now freed the towns of Castello, Fermo, Cisterna, Montone and Perouse from the tyrant's yoke and have restored them to their former obedience to the Holy See. Finally we have broken the power of the tyrant Pandolfo Petrucci over Sienna, where he exercised such atrocious cruelty. And these masks are especially precious to us because they bring us a fresh proof of the particular affection which we know that you and Your Illustrious Lord have already shown us on other occasions and which you prove once again in the long letter which came with them. For all that we are infinitely grateful, although the greatness of your qualities and of your kindness towards us cannot be recognized in words but demands deeds. We will wear the masks with pleasure and their perfect beauty will need no other ornament.

Your Excellency's Fellow-Godparent and Younger Brother,  
CÆSAR, DUKE OF ROMAGNA.

At the Pontifical Camp at Aquapendente.

This curious interchange of letters between the most upright woman of her time and the most

crafty bandit ought not to surprise us. Isabella d'Este was upright, but she was also, whether she liked it or not, a "political woman." Now all Italian politics in those days of small States and great artists was a question of supporting the strongest, or, as Napoleon put it, "of flying to the help of Victory." But who would be the strongest —the King or the Emperor, the Pope or the Republic? And by the Republic is meant "The Most Serene," for the others had enough to do to roll themselves into a ball when the enemy appeared and scarcely thought of threatening their neighbours. The only probable invaders were France or Germany, Venice or the Papacy. And once the strongest power was known, or guessed, the problem was to serve it whilst guarding against it, so that it would not think of crushing its own friends after having sharpened its teeth on its enemies. They were strange times. When the gates of a city were opened to a powerful ally, no one ever knew whether that ally meant to dance with the master of the stronghold or cut off his head, place the emblem of some order round his neck or put him in an iron cage. It was necessary to protect oneself, to adopt ruses, to husband all one's resources, never to burn one's boats and always to be ready to turn right round within an hour. One lived amongst lies as one lives under the rigours of winter or summer: that is to say, not without perceiving them, nor without suffering from them, but without thinking that it might be possible to lighten their burden.

There is a symbol which constantly recurs amongst the *imprese* of the Gonzaga, which Isabella had under her feet on the pavement of her *Grotta*, and which figured in chased gold even on her husband's sword—the emblem of force. You will see it in the Louvre if you lean over the glass case which contains the *cinquedea* of the Marquis Gonzaga a muzzle ornamented with flying ribbons, and above it the device which was the watchword and the answer to the riddle of all life as it was lived in the XVIth century CAUTIUS.

## II.

### THE LIFE SHE CHOSE TO LEAD

HER RELAXATION AFTER so much restraint was prodigious. Once the *museruola* was off, and in everything that was not politics, her true physiognomy—that of our portrait in the Louvre—stands forth. “By nature essentially greedy and impatient,” she said of herself. Her wish for anything was like a child screaming until appeased by its toy. One day, when she was at her father’s house in Ferrara, she heard that the decorations ordered for her *studio* at Mantua were not progressing, for Luca Liombeni, the painter, was a dawdler. She fulminated threats :

Knowing by experience that you are as slow in finishing your work as in everything else, we are writing this to remind you that for once you have got to change your nature and that if our *studio* is not finished by our return we mean to send you to prison in the *Castello*—and that is no joke . . .

And a few days later :

In reply to your letter, we are glad to hear that you will do your best to finish our *studio* and so escape prison. Enclosed herewith is a list of the devices which we want you to paint on the frieze. We count on you to arrange them as nicely as possible so that they will be most effective. You can paint what you like inside the closets, provided that you do it skilfully. If not, then you will repaint them at your own expense and you will spend the winter in the dungeon. You can go and spend

\* night there to amuse yourself and see if the lodging is to your liking. Perhaps you will come back more anxious to please us in the future.

Her dressmakers were treated in the same way  
One day she had to go to Genoa She wrote to  
her Chamberlain, Alberta da Bologna, to tell him  
to have made for her at once—but *at once*—a  
*camora* of grey satin with black velvet sleeves  
When he did not send what she wanted a mad fury  
took hold of her

" You must have lost not only your memory, but  
your head and your eyes," she wrote to him

Her couriers and her muleteers hurried all over  
Italy, taking with them her extravagant curses

" If the bracelets which we ordered several  
months ago do not arrive before the end of the  
summer when one has one's arms bare, they will be  
useless," she wrote to a correspondent in Venice,  
when certain jewellery was behindhand She  
always wanted everything at once, at no matter  
what price. When she was about to go to the  
wedding of her sister Beatrice with Ludovic the  
Moor she directed Zorzo Brognolo " to search  
all the shops in Venice to find eighty of the finest  
sables with which to line a *sbernia*, " and she adds

Try to find me a skin with the head complete so that I can  
make a muff of it to carry in my hand. Even if it costs ten  
ducats (about 500 francs of our money) <sup>1</sup> that would not be too  
dear provided that it is a fine one. Buy me, too, eight yards of  
the best crimson satin that you can find in Venice as a trimming  
for this *sbernia* and for the love of God be as diligent as you usually  
are, for nothing, I assure you, could give me greater pleasure!

<sup>1</sup> Written in 1913 when the franc was normal.—Translator's Note.

Now we can understand the meaning of the device which she had painted on the earthenware tiles of her *Grotta*: a blazing sun, with fiery rays shooting from it, and the words : “*Per un dexir.*”

Desire for what? For everything. Except for evil, or what she considered to be evil, and did not even think about, there was nothing in the world with regard to which she was not greedy and envious. She wanted to see everything, to know everything, and to be able to do everything.

First of all, to see everything. As soon as she could, as soon as her husband gave her leave, she would summon her ladies-in-waiting and her pages and she would start off, with her full retinue if she was in funds, almost alone and *incognito* if her jewels were in pawn, to see some new thing in the vast world : Florence or Venice or Rome or Milan or Lyons or the Sainte-Baume.

“This cursed passion for travelling which the head of the house of d’Este has bequeathed to all his family,” wrote Baldassare Castiglione to her.

She was not to be rebuffed by bad roads or foul weather or lack of money. Distant towns, lakes, mountains, convents, pilgrimages—everything attracted her, including the ceremonies peculiar to each country, their fêtes, tournaments, workshops and collections, their illustrious sovereigns and their courts. Active, restless, everywhere at once, welcomed wherever she was, missed wherever she was not, and mourned when she died—she was not merely an Italian woman, she was Italy itself on the march! And her fine

profile, thoughtful and resolute, figures on every horizon in the peninsula.

But she wanted much more than that and the idea of seeing neighbouring kingdoms, the courts beyond the mountains and beyond the seas, haunted her! Wherefore what joy was hers when another court came to her! We can see this by her letters to her sister-in-law, Elisabetta Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino. That wise princess, whose long, full and rather sad face one can see in the *Salle de la Tribune*, in the Uffizi, was exactly the person to become Isabella d'Este's most intimate friend for she had the same tastes and an entirely different character. She was patient, reserved, a little slow, and receptive rather than expansive. The correspondence between the two sisters-in-law was continuous and full. Writing a letter is like opening one's hand. To some people one lowers one or two fingers, to others three, but to one person, at most, one lets loose a whole fistful of truths about oneself, which one's better sense would never expose. Isabella d'Este used to write letters to a great many people but only to her sister-in-law did she open her whole hand. Returning to Mantua after a stay at Milan, with Louis XII and his Court, she wrote to her thus

A few weeks ago I was summoned to Milan by my Illustrious Lord, there to pay homage to His Most Christian Majesty and I arrived there on the eve of the feast of *Corpus Christi*. After dinner and as I was getting ready to go and pay him my respects, I received a message from him summoning me to the tournament at the place where the *gisstra* was to be held. I went there accordingly at the time mentioned and I found His Majesty,

who met me on the steps and received me with the greatest courtesy All the ladies of Milan were present and the Princess of Bisignano, as well as all the barony and nobility of France and the great lords of Italy, the Duke of Savoy, the Marquis of Mantua and of Montferrat and all the Governors of the Milanese cities and the ambassadors of all the Italian States. There were so many French lords present that it would be impossible to name them all But I must mention your nephew the Duke of Bourbon, a tall young man of fine and noble bearing, who is very like his mother [Chiara de Montpensier, sister of the Marquis Gonzaga and of the Duchess of Urbino, to whom this letter is addressed] in complexion, eyes and features If the Roman Court is marvellous in its ceremony and its order that of France is not less astonishing and extraordinary in its confusion and disorder—so much so that it is quite impossible to distinguish the rank of one man from that of another! It is also remarkable, certainly, for its freedom and absence of etiquette At this Court, for example, Cardinals are treated with no more honour than ordinary chaplains are in Rome No one gives up his place for them or pays them any particular respect, from the King to the humblest subject Nevertheless His Majesty is always very courteous and considerate to all those who are courageous enough to approach him and especially so to ladies He rises from his seat and raises his hat to do them honour. He has come three times to visit me in my apartment The first time, when I was at dinner with Signor Zoanne Giacomo Trivulzio, he waited more than half an hour for my return and each time he stayed not less than two or three hours, conversing on every subject in the most amicable manner possible I did not fail to speak in praise of Your Highness in the course of our conversation Madame Margherita de San Severino, the Countess of Musocco and sometimes the Princess de Bisignano, who are very well versed in French, were our interpreters In spite of repeated efforts I have never succeeded in finding His Majesty at the Castello except on the day when he invited me to a public banquet at the Rocchetta, at which the Princess de Bisignano and I had the honour of sitting at his table We danced without ceremony both before and after supper His Majesty danced with me and to our great amusement and delight he also made the Cardinals of Narbonne, San Severino, Ferrara and Finale, who were present at the banquet, dance too

I will say nothing of the public spectacles which were given on the Piazza because I know that they will already have been described at length to you by your ambassador. It is true that I have seen tournaments better organized but I have never seen, and I do not think that in all Christendom it would be possible to see, a greater number and a greater diversity of people. The majority were nobles—and not only those of Milan, which must be the first or at least the second city in the world—for the entire Court of France and most of the Courts of Italy were assembled there, so that Your Excellency will realize what a proud and splendid sight it was. There were many more people there than we would have been able to see in the King of France's own palace, because the nobles who have come with him to Italy do not normally live at Court, and even if they were by chance present at some solemn ceremony we would not in any case have seen the whole population and nobility of Milan and, one might say, the whole of Italy, for the gentry and the citizens of many other towns came in to be present at these spectacles. Oh, how happy I was! And what joy I had afterwards whenever I recalled everything to mind. Only think what it would have been if Your Ladyship had been there and we had been able to exchange our thoughts out loud! I could go on to describe all the individual visits that I received from Italian and French noblemen and from Milanese ladies as well as those of the King and the Cardinals, but all that and the rest I leave Your Ladyship to imagine, for fear that I may give you too many grounds to be jealous of me!

One ambition, however, remained in the heart of this impassioned pilgrim, an ambition one would scarcely suspect when one thinks of the Italy of that period. Within the ancient, sovereign towers of the *Castello* the idea which was preying upon the heart of the "prima donna del mondo" was the same one which agitates little provincial minds behind the white curtains of their windows to see Paris!

In September 1507 she received an invitation

from Louis XII and Anne of Brittany to visit the Court of France and act as godmother to the baby they were expecting. Her cosmopolitan soul, eager for travel, warmly welcomed the idea and, intoxicated with joy, she wrote to her sister-in-law of Urbino :

In reply to your letter, I must admit that you have been present at very important happenings in Rome and Urbino and that you would have seen even more if His Catholic Majesty had come to visit you or if the Most Serene King of the Romans had been able to undertake his journey through Italy and if the Diet had not decided otherwise. But how can I in any way set this against all that awaits me in the near future, eclipsing everything that I have seen and done in the past, which Your Ladyship already knows about ? Let me tell you, then, that His Most Christian Majesty thinks that his Queen cannot bring a son into the world unless I am present, and that in consequence he begs me most persistently to be with her for this event in order that I may both honour the birth with my presence and hold the infant in my arms at the baptismal font ! What greater honour could there be in the world than to be the godmother of a King of France ! Oh, what splendours, what pomps and what glories I am about to take part in ! I shall not only visit Paris, the most flourishing university and the most populous city in the world, but the whole of France, Burgundy and Flanders and perhaps I shall go as far as Santiago in Galicia Oh, what a number of new countries and royal spectacles I shall see in this journey ! Your Ladyship and Madonna Emilia, who know so much of that country and its customs, will be able to imagine it all

But what will happen if my journey to France takes place and if the coming of the Emperor to Italy, which has been prevented by so many Diets, were to be abandoned ? In that case it will be I who will have the glory which you covet ! I do not know if after that you will still be able to pretend that you are my equal and if it will be possible for me to accept so readily your invitation to Urbino ! When I return to Italy I shall begin to ask myself whether the country is really worthy of supporting me, whether carpets should not be spread under my feet and a dais prepared

for me wherever I go! But, joking apart, I am really hoping to start for France in a few days and I am busy making my preparations. When I come back we must plan to meet each other, for I am as anxious for that as Your Highness can be.

MANTUA, 25 September, 1507

This was not vanity—it was simply curiosity, a wish to admire other faces, other customs, other costumes, other aspects of life. Her desire was as keen, and her pleasure as acute when it was a question of the poor fishermen of Peschiera or the gardeners of Sermione as when it was a question of the first Court in Christendom. When she went on an excursion on Lake Garda with her ladies-in-waiting and her pages it might have been a girl's school on holiday. She was enthusiastic about everything—about the view that one had from Lonato, Sermione, and Peschiera, about Roman ruins, about Catullus' grotto, about fruit which the peasants brought her, or fish that was offered her by fishermen. Everything amused her—even the harangues to which the notabilities of the countryside subjected her.

Yesterday I was at Grignano, whose inhabitants gratified me with a presentation of fish and oranges and also with a long discourse in Italian made by a boring pedant in the most flamboyant style. But Your Ladyship must not think that this was the first occurrence of the kind which I have had to submit to, though it was certainly the most extraordinary. At Lonato I had three of them, two in Italian, spoken by citizens, and one in Latin, recited by a child of seven! At Sermione, two again from the mayor of the commune and a third from the curate. Here, at Salò, two of average merit, neither too delightful nor too ordinary, but more useful in that a magnificent present went with them. [The *Rittratti*, by Tressino.]

She was amused when her dwarf Morgantino was drenched with rain on the box seat of her carriage and nearly drowned "like a little chicken." She was amused at the sight of one of her waiting-maids who was thrown from her mule "with one foot in the stirrup and the other in the air," for, she said, "the journey would be dull enough if silly accidents such as this did not happen occasionally." She was amused by the paltry garrison which Spain maintained at Rocca di Peschiera :

I rode through the town and found the Governor of the castle, a Spanish captain, who courteously received me at the Rocca, where, seeing that he had only a dozen or so tiny little men at his disposal, it occurred to me that I and my ladies-in-waiting could easily have made him and his troops prisoners, and thus I should have become mistress of the place without much recrimination on the part either of the King of France or of the Emperor, since the Spaniards are occupying it without having any right to do so . . .

Many years later, when she had become a widow and more of a traveller than ever, she tramped the streets of Venice in search of anything that was being built, painted or written, wearing out all her retinue by her childish curiosity and exhausting the worthy Baldassare Castiglione : pursuing, in fact, up to her last years, what had always been the dream of her life—to see everything.

Next, to know everything. Isabella d'Este had a scholar's soul. Married before she was sixteen and several times acting as Regent, she set herself eagerly to study.

"I hear that you are still studying grammar,"

Brother Francesco Silvestri wrote to her "I hope that when I come to see you again you will have gone on to rhetoric."

She took lessons from everyone, interrogated every specialist and corresponded with every traveller. She received letters from Ireland, Rhodes, Spain, Rome, letters from humanists, knights, diplomats, courtesans, saints, popes, dwarfs. Her correspondents, well aware that she would listen to everything, told her everything their impressions of the first natives brought from the Indies by Christopher Columbus, of the penitence of the pilgrims at St. Patrick's Well, of Lucrezia Borgia's wedding dress, of the *tableaux vivants* at Julius II's triumph, of Luther's heresies, of new editions by Aldo Manuzio, of Caradosso's medals.

Was ever a moment so propitious for a spirit excited by a universal curiosity! Everything was being discovered at the same time. In the studios there were working the three great discoverers of the human face—Leonardo, Raphael and Michael Angelo. At sea there were sailing the three great draughtsmen of continents—Christopher Columbus, Vasco de Gama and Magellan. Isabella d'Este's reign began in 1490 and did not end until 1539. Now it was between 1490 and 1539 that the true shape of the human world became known. Between 1490 and 1539 a continent and three new oceans were discovered, and the circle of the earth was drawn for the first time by the wake of ships. Hardly any progress was made but she heard of it, applauded it and wanted to

meet its author. From the moment when Magellan's companions landed on their return she had no rest until one of them, Pigafetti, had visited her in the suite of *Camerini* and described to her all that he had seen in his three years' trip overseas and amongst unknown peoples. She was sent drawings of men and horses found on newly-discovered islands off the coast of Guinea ; she surrounded herself with plans and views of all the great cities of the world. In the narrow little rooms in which she lived, every country, every custom, every kind of dress even, was depicted in some form or other. No idea was in the air, but she must breathe it in. No rumour crossed the world but she must hear of it. Her quivering, receptive senses were on the watch at the far end of the old palace on the lake, like the antennæ of some magic implement set to catch every vibration which took place in the world.

But to see everything and to know everything was not enough for her. She wanted to be able to do everything. Not for herself, but for her husband, for her brother, for her sons. And she was as impulsive and as tenacious in her ambitions as she was in her curiosity. One day she got it into her head that her son Ercole ought to be made a cardinal. He was already twenty, and it was high time for him to be clad in scarlet. She set off, therefore, to Rome, where she arrived on the day after the battle of Pavia, which had been won by her nephew the Constable of Bourbon. She found Pope Clement VII much embarrassed

by her presence, for he was allied to the French—and the French had been beaten A lucky encounter! Fear would make him amenable She asked for a cardinal's hat for her son

The Pope, without daring to refuse her, procrastinated He sent her wine, sugar, oil, barley, compliments—but no hat. Whereupon, being obstinately bent upon the matter, she installed herself amongst his enemies in the Colonna Palace in the Quirinal The Pope expected to weary her by his subterfuges, and she swore to exhaust him by her obstinacy At that precise moment news came from Mantua that her brother-in-law, Cardinal Sigismondo Gonzaga, was dead Here was a cardinal's hat with no head beneath it! She hurried to the Vatican to demand that hat for her son The Pope, with his position taken by storm, promised but did nothing beyond postponing the matter to the next election of cardinals. Isabella was not satisfied with this *in petto* She would only depart when she had a security

Two years went by and she was still there, waiting for a favourable opportunity Meanwhile she held a literary court and was in no way bored. But a big storm was gathering over Rome. Charles-Quint, who had been many a time betrayed by Clement VII, lost patience and sent the Constable of Bourbon to Rome with strict orders. The Colonna profited by the occasion to rise in armed revolt. Twelve thousand *lansquenets* crossed the Alps and the Papal armies withered away and

vanished over the horizon. The gates of Rome were closed and the treasure buried. Everyone felt very ill at ease. But not so Isabella. She remained comfortably established in a square facing the Vatican, which she was besieging on one side with her claims whilst on the other her nephew the Constable of Bourbon, and her own son, Ferrante Gonzaga, besieged it with their lances. All her friends said "Fly! Fly!" But she remained. She would not go without that hat. She had the wherewithal to pay for it, and there was no Pope so obstinate that the Treasurer would not have her moment sooner or later.

The moment came, indeed, when, cost what it might, the Pope had to have soldiers. To get soldiers, money was required, and to obtain money he had only one method left to him—a sixty-fourth method which Panurge did not have at his disposal—that of making cardinals. He resigned himself to it and made five of them—at a consideration of forty thousand ducats each. Ercole was nominated, and Cardinal Pizzino came to the Colonna Palace to bring his mother the hat. And then anything might happen, for all she cared! Above the walls appeared black, white and red standards. The wild *lansquenets*, with empty stomachs and open wallets, let themselves go in plunder and debauchery. From her barricaded palace, where she received hundreds of people almost dead with fright, Isabella heard the gun of the Château Saint-Angelo fired at random by Benvenuto Cellini. The Constable of Bourbon





PORTRAIT OF ISABELLA D'ESTE  
By Titian, in the Vienna Museum

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was killed. The troops, getting entirely out of hand, destroyed, plundered and burned everything. Thirty thousand Romans were assassinated or died of plague. But to her it mattered not a row of beans! She had got that hat!

Titian painted her thus, in her hour of triumph, in the famous portrait which is now in the Vienna Museum. She has on more ornaments than an idol or a queen in a pack of cards, with pearls in her ears and a cluster of brilliants fixed in the middle of an enormous turban, which was called a *balzo* and was as ugly as that of Mme. de Staël. One of those furs which she had ordered to be bought for her at no matter what price falls diagonally across her, stiff and ungainly. Her sleeves reach to her fingers, her elbows are stuck out and her hands are on her knees in the attitude of a market woman at her stall. Her expression is stern and judicial. This portrait is certainly not in the least like its model, but it calls to mind the idea which we have conceived, from a distance, of the sovereign lady who had rallied all the potentates, led all the fashions and triumphed over all the factions—according, at least, to the device which decorated her rooms, that mystic figure, XXVII, into which the initiated read the meaning, “*Vinte sette*”—that is to say, factions defeated.

For by that time her prestige had gone far beyond Mantua, Urbino and even Ferrara, and all the palaces in the world looked towards her as towards “the origin and fountain of every beautiful

## *Celebrities of the Italian Renaissance*

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fashion in Italy"—as was said by the Queen of Poland. In her courier's bag she was constantly finding letters such as the following, from Laura Bentivoglio, giving her an account of a visit to Lucrezia Borgia :

She bade me sit down and asked after Your Excellency with charming graciousness, begging me to tell her about your dresses and especially about your coiffures Then, à propos her Spanish gowns, she said that if she had anything which you would like to see or to have she would gladly do you that service, as she was very anxious to please Your Excellency. . .

Or this, again, from Lucrezia d'Este, when the latter had just left the same beautiful lady :

I found her lying on her bed wearing a gown of black silk with narrow sleeves and frills at the wrists After many caresses and affectionate welcomes she asked me what were the latest fashions in Mantua and admired my coiffure I promised to make some toques in our style and to send them to her The rosettes that I was wearing on my forehead pleased her, too, and she begged me to show them to a jeweller and have them copied

Similarly Francis I asked her for a wax doll dressed like herself in the Mantuan fashion, and with its hair done in the same way as hers to serve as a model for the beautiful ladies of Paris.

Under Louis XII she had a greater triumph still. The Queen of France, the worthy Anne of Brittany, having heard so much about Italy, conceived the idea of making a series of formal appearances there, to show off her head-dresses, her hackneys and her jewels. She was already having her gala dresses prepared when Louis XII good-

naturally warned her that she did not realize what she was letting herself in for, and that it was scarcely prudent to exhibit herself in a country which contained Isabella d'Este. Upon which the good queen, after deep thought, made up her mind not to give up her journey, but to modify its sumptuary strategy. She decided to go wearing no special clothes, but quietly dressed in black, and supported by four of the greatest beauties of the Court—Mme de Nevers, Mme. de Longueville, the Marchioness de Montferrat and an English-woman—mere ladies-in-waiting, whose success would redound to her own credit, and whose failure would not in any way impair it. As a matter of fact the journey did not take place—but this change of front was an admission none the less, and the great Marchioness, who was very well aware of it, won a victory over France that day which was less questionable than that which her husband won at Fornovo.

It was, indeed, at home in her own little Court in her own territory that Isabella d'Este was incomparable. At Mantua hospitality was not practised as a duty, but as a sport in which all her faculties were given free scope. There was a great bustle in those days when there appeared on the horizon some guest of distinction with a huge, free-and-easy and hungry retinue which he imagined he ought to bring with him in order to do his hosts honour. Every resource was mobilized—tapestries, silver and servants were borrowed and lent from Court to Court, and no pains

were spared to discover the tastes of the guest who was to be honoured.

"Benedetto," wrote Isabella d'Este to his secretary when Ludovic the Moor was expected at Mantua.

We intend to lodge the Duke here, in our own suite in the Castello, giving him the painted room with its ante-room, the Camerino del sole, the Cassone room, our own room and the dining hall. We expect that His Excellency himself will occupy the Cassone room, which we will decorate with black and violet hangings, because, although we have heard that he is still in mourning [Beatrice d'Este, Ludovic's wife, had died some years previously], we think that will seem a little less sad and will prove that here at least we have good cause to rejoice on this occasion. But I hope that you will consult Messire Antonio di Costabili and Messire Visconti as regards the hangings for the other rooms, unless you propose mentioning it to the Duke himself, and I hope you will let me know their opinion, for it seems to me that it would not be fitting for our rooms to be bare, even if His Excellency brings his own hangings with him. Let me know, also, what wines the Duke usually drinks and what kind of dress it would be best for me to wear . . .

She had no doubts about her own prestige, however.

"Let Your Lordship be bold and invite the Pope to come to Mantua, where we will arrange to do him honour," she wrote to her husband, when Julius II was in Perugia with his whole Pontifical Court of seventy-eight Cardinals. And later on, when her son was reigning in Mantua, she invited Charles-Quint there without the least hesitation. The two "halves of God" found in her home something which all their united powers could not create—a soul in which was reflected

not only all that was best in its own epoch, but also a vision of what humanity would become in better times. They found, too, an admirable treasury of art and letters, a collection in which all their curiosity could be satisfied. Isabella d'Este knew this, and she relied greatly on the prestige of her *Grotta* to dazzle the eyes even of those accustomed to imperial splendours.

Four hundred years ago, as to-day, when one sovereign was received by another, it was customary to take him out hunting, to have a review in his honour and to act a comedy for him. To spill the blood of wild beasts and to laugh at human foibles seemed then, as nowadays, the most enviable of royal privileges. To this unchangeable formula she was the first, it appears, to add a visit to museums. When her husband had exhausted his guests in hunting the wild boar at the risk of breaking their necks, his wife confronted them with her mythological allegories, submitted symbols to their judgment and forced their intellects to make an effort. And her prestige was considerably enhanced thereby.

This prestige—a rare thing in itself—never drooped for a moment during the whole course of a long life spent amongst so many perils and tempted by so many infamous examples. And—a rarer thing still—it was always exerted on the side of the good, or at least on that of the least evil. We have already seen that Isabella d'Este did not shun the necessities of XVIth-century politics, but she brought to them something

of which the XVIth century gave her very few examples—pity for the conquered and loyalty to the unfortunate. She allowed her husband, as the Pope's Captain-General, to invade Bologna and drive her sister Lucrezia and her brother-in-law Annibal Bentivoglio out of it, but she received them in her own palace at Mantua and forced her husband to protect them in defiance of the angry Pope. She resigned herself to congratulating the Borgia on his victories, but she found sanctuary for the Duke and Duchess of Urbino, whom the Borgia had just driven from their territory. She could not prevent the French from entering Milan and ruining the Sforza, but she welcomed Giovanni Sforza and his partisans. Leo X was inflexible in his opposition to Francesco Maria della Rovere, but she was just as determined to extend her hospitality to him after he had been proscribed. During her reign Mantua became a kind of sacred asylum for the exiled and the vanquished. She went, in fact, to the extreme limit allowed in support of right against might and of loyalty against treason.

And all this without any pretension to virtue, without any ethical theory, without any mysticism. For we can see by her correspondence that this woman, who was inquisitive about almost everything, had no inquisitiveness about 'religion or transcendental philosophy. Theology bored her. Her conception of duty was that of a strong, healthy temperament, sensitive to the happiness or pains of other people, gratifying itself most and

*Isabella d'Este and her Allegories in the Louvre*

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displaying itself most freely when doing good  
Her virtue was a natural advantage. She did good  
for good's sake, as others are artists for art's sake,  
or others again are lovers for love's sake, without  
thinking of rewards which the mind could not  
conceive or of punishments which the heart could  
not understand   NEC SPE, NEC METU

### III.

#### THE LIFE OF WHICH SHE DREAMED

IN THE LOUVRE, in the *Galerie du Bord de l'Eau*, between Mantegna's *Madonna of Victory* and his *Saint Sebastian* are five pictures which attract the passer-by as though they were riddles. They are allegories : Perugino's *Fight between Love and Chastity*, Lorenzo Costa's *Triumph of Poetry* or *The Court of Isabella d'Este*, the two famous panels by Mantegna—*Wisdom Victorious over the Vices* and *Parnassus*—and a work begun by Mantegna and painted after his death by Lorenzo Costa—*Comus* or *The Triumph of Music*, with the *Fable of Leda*. The passer-by, lingering in front of these riddles, vaguely feels that there is a link, a common idea, connecting them. Nor is he wrong : that link is Isabella d'Este.

These five pictures, as well as many others, were painted under her direction, for the decoration of her little museum in the palace at Mantua, which she called her *Grotta*. It was she who decided on the dimensions, the subject, the size of the figures, the exact lighting of each and their precise position in a decorative and symbolical whole, planned beforehand. No work, even if it were by the greatest of the Masters, was admitted into this *Grotta* if it did not fit in with the general effect

desired These five riddles, then, are five fragments of the same train of thought—and that the most liberal and intimate in the mind of the great Marchioness. They reveal, not what she found in life but what she dreamed of putting into it, though actually she could only put it in her collection

### § 1 *Her Poetical "Inventions"*<sup>1</sup>

Let us look, for instance, at the first panel by Mantegna, placed next to the *Madonna of Victory*. To the uninformed passer-by it is merely an amusing affair, whimsical but quite unintelligible.

A helmeted woman, doubtless the decorative figure in some mythological fête such as was often given in the XVIth century, is driving out of a princely pleasure-ground a crowd of beggars, hags, cripples, men-monkeys and other phenomena of the Court of Miracles, who have made their way in there, perhaps to beg, perhaps to see the rock-work coloured pink by Bengal fire—which is, in fact, very curious. The poor people do not know which way to run, and we see them wading up to their waists in a pool, the stronger carrying

<sup>1</sup> *Wisdom Victorious over the Vices or Virtue Driving away the Vices* was painted by Mantegna in the last years of the XVth century. *Pegasus or The Triumph of Love or Venus with Vulcan and Orpheus* was painted in 1497. *The Court of Isabella d'Este or The Triumph of Poetry* was painted by Lorenzo Costa in 1505. *The Fight between Love and Chastity* by Perugino in the same year and *Cœurs* in 1506. These five pictures, due to the "invention" of Isabella d'Este, were immediately placed in her *Grotte*, and remained there till 1630 at which date they were bought by Cardinal Richelieu and taken to the Château Plessis-Richelieu whence they eventually came to the Louvre.

their helpless companions and disturbing water-lilies and plantains in their flight. Their brats are following them, scrambling from the hedges more quickly than they climbed into them ; and a lean tree enlaced with devices like a reed-pipe, raises its arms to the sky as if in protest against this fearful splashing.

What does all this mean ? One can understand that 'deformed and half-naked people have no right to enter a garden where the yew trees are so well clipped and where beautiful ladies are disguised as Olympian divinities : but all the same the brutal manner in which they are being sent away inspires a little pity. This, however, is *Wisdom Victorious over the Vices*, and our sympathy ought to be entirely on the side of the guardian of the grounds, who is Minerva, and the poor people whom she is hustling away ought to fill us with the most profound horror.

"Beauty is a holy thing," says Bembo in Baldassare Castiglione's *Cortegiano*.

It comes from God It is the pleasant, joyful, agreeable and desirable aspect of good, whilst ugliness is the obscure, grievous, displeasing and sad aspect of evil Exterior beauty is the true sign of interior beauty—as in trees the beauty of the flowers bears witness to the goodness of their fruit

Thus, according to the Marchioness' two great friends, Castiglione and Bembo, Mantegna's poor people, being ugly, are vices and meet to be killed.

Similarly, when we turn to Perugino's picture we ought to look at it several times before giving our allegiance : for we might make some gross





THE LIGHT BETWEEN LOVE AND CHIVALRY

By Perugino, in the Louvre. Allegory ordered by Isabella d'Este for her Grotta  
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error. What, indeed, could be uglier than these fat, half-naked women slaughtering the graceful little children who are clinging to them and trying to embrace them! They are brandishing their lances against the poor brats, whom they are holding by the hair, it is, in fact, a regular massacre of the innocents. Not at all, the author tells us. These innocents are the guilty, they are the Amours—illegitimate and adulterous, to say nothing worse—and the fat ladies are the Virtues—Pallas, Diana, all that is best in the world. The lady in the middle, however, who is defending herself as well as she can against her rival's bow with a large stuck on which is a plume, is Venus, and the plume is an insidious torch with which she is trying to set the heart of the innocent huntress on fire.

All this fine "invention" is by Isabella d'Este. Since Perugino understood as little about it as we do now, she wrote him no less than fifty-three letters to drive it into his mind. But the unfortunate artist—whose head, if we can credit Vasari, was exceptionally hard—persisted in being stupid about it. What was he to do when the courier from Mantua brought him two ribbons showing the height and width of the panel to be painted, together with instructions such as this?

My poetical Invention, which I wish to see you paint, is a battle of Chastity against Love. Pallas will appear as having vanquished Cupid—she has broken his golden arrow and his silver bow and has thrown them at his feet. With one hand she holds the blind boy by the bandage he is wearing and with the other she is about to strike him with her lance. Diana must

## *Celebrities of the Italian Renaissance*

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also have some share in this victory. Some part of Venus' dress—her mitre, her garland or her veil, perhaps—will be slightly torn. As for Diana, Venus' torch will have burnt her clothes, but neither of the two goddesses will be wounded.

By dint of thinking about it, Perugino was at last able to solve this conundrum, although the details which had been given him as the most important were so inconspicuous when reduced to lines and colours, that his eye could scarcely see what his mind had intended to put in. But what could he do—he a painter of *Adorations* and “Holy Conversations”—when he received commands such as this?

Behind the four divinities, chaste nymphs, followers of Pallas and Diana, clad as you think best, must be engaged in a sharp fight with lascivious fauns and satyrs and a thousand other little Cupids

“How am I to show this crowd fighting?” he must have asked himself. “I know! I will devise one gesture and repeat it with every one of these nymphs!”

And that was what he actually did. Looking at our picture in the Louvre, we can imagine ourselves watching a military physical exercise when every man in a platoon, under the eye of a blasphemous corporal, is raising the same arm in the same movement.

“At any rate,” the painter could say to himself, “I will get my own back in the scenery.”

No such thing! Everything was already arranged for. Just as the general had ordered the

"movement" and the "objective," so also had she indicated the "ground"

In order to express the story more fully and to decorate it more lavishly, an olive-tree, the sacred shrub of Pallas, will spring from the ground at her side and an owl, her symbol, will be perched on one of the branches. By Venus' side will grow the myrtle, which is her emblem, and to enhance the charm of the whole there must be a river or the sea in the background. Fauns, satyrs and little Cupids, cleaving the waves on the backs of swans or flying through the air, will be hurrying to Cupid's aid, anxious to take part in this amorous adventure. On the banks of the river or on the sea shore will appear Jupiter and those other gods who are always the enemies of Chastity. The former, in the guise of a bull, will be carrying off the beautiful Europa, and Mercury, like an eagle after his prey, will be flying round the nymph Glaucère, who is holding a shield on which are engraved the attributes of the goddess Pallas. Polypheme, with his one eye, is chasing Galatea, Phœbus is in pursuit of the nymph who has already been turned into a laurel tree, Pluto, who has just captured Proserpine, is bearing her off to his infernal kingdom and Neptune is about to seize Coronis, but at that very moment she is changing into a crow. I am showing you all these details in a little sketch which I am sending, and with this, added to my explanations, you will understand better what I want. If you find that there are too many figures for the subject you can reduce the number, provided always that the main idea is not changed—I mean Pallas, Diana, Venus and Cupid      *but you are forbidden to add anything of your own.*

The result of this "imposition" is now before our eyes—it is Perugino's worst picture, almost as irritating to look at as Isabella's description of it is to read. Could anything be more ridiculous than these little allegorical marionettes scattered over the background, these swans and Cupids and satyrs and, particularly, this unfortunate tree-woman, whose ten fingers, ending off as branches,

feel the air with their myriad papillæ, which have now become leaves in the wind?

On what theme or “invention” is *The Court of Isabella d’Este*, which is hung as a pendant to the Perugino, based? We do not know, for in this case, no doubt, the Marchioness gave her orders to the painter by word of mouth. But though Lorenzo Costa did not produce anything quite so gauche as Perugino did, he only just avoided doing so. We can see plainly enough that a party of noble personages, picturesquely disguised, have come to disport themselves at the entrance of a coppice on the shore of an arm of the sea closely encircled by hills. But who can say what they are doing? Who, above all, can say what common idea has brought them together? Not one of them is looking at his neighbour. All of them are absorbed in their own actions, which are, moreover, very peculiar. A lady, seated, is holding the head of a sheep in her lap and is placing a necklace of flowers over it, without looking at it. Another lady, facing her, and also seated, has a bull calf, as gentle as the sheep. She, too, has prepared a wreath and is holding her aureole of flowers over the bull’s head. In the middle distance, a third wreath appears. But in this case it is not the head of a sheep or a calf which is about to receive it, but that of a beautiful lady, who is standing up and who is wearing a trailing red dress with those wide, falling sleeves, pointed at the lower end, which Mussati compared with Catalan bucklers. We seem to recognize her readily enough as the



PLATE XIII



THE COURT OF ISABELLA D'ESTE  
By Lorenzo Costa, in the Louvre Allegory ordered by Isabella d'Este for her Grotta

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famous Marchioness of Mantua. With her right hand resting on her heart and her left holding up the front of her skirt, she is lowering her head like a victim under the sacrificial knife. But this is so that she may more easily don the leafy crown which is being held out to her by a little winged Cupid standing up on the knees of another lady.

All round there is a circle of old Turks and young troubadours. Some are standing and playing on the viola, the lyre or the monochord, others are seated, and in spite of the inconvenience of their postures are trying to write on their tablets. Whilst all these people are amusing themselves thus, two warlike figures on guard to the right and left, at the corners of the picture, are watching that no one comes near. One, dressed as a Roman soldier, is armed with a long halberd, which he seems to be using at random, for he has broken off the branch of a tree and cut off the head of a dog—and this seems to have made him sad. The other, a woman armed with a bow and arrow, is watching what is going on in the distance, and is ready to intervene. In the lower corner, in the background, one party of horsemen, clad in armour, is attacking another, while a few yards away some travellers are talking peacefully enough as they disembark from a ship whose sails are being furled. Finally, in the woods, in the background, we can see distant figures chasing each other between the trunks of willows, laurels and palms or grouped in amorous pose.

Such is the general appearance of this picture,

which is sometimes called the *Incoronazione*, sometimes *The Triumph of Poetry*, sometimes *The Court of Isabella d'Este*. All three titles are suitable. It is probable that the personages thus disguised are the intimates of the great Marchioness, and that the Roman warrior in the foreground, handling his halberd like a rake, is her friend Castiglione, the diplomat with the blue eyes and the fair beard whose expression interests visitors to the Louvre. . . . Who can the musician be in the middle distance? He has a turban on his head and a monochord in his hand, and is turning his long, pointed beard towards us and indicating with the end of his bow what is happening to the Marchioness. This is a prophetic vision of Pietro Bembo, grown old and venerable, and having at last ceased to play and sing at the feet of the lovely ladies of his time. We have only to take off his turban and give him a red hat to make a cardinal of him. And if the painter had put a little more character into the young people—the violinist, for instance, who is playing with his head in the air as if looking to the sky for his notes, and the historian or poet, with a plumed hood on his head, who is holding his ink-pot like a cup—we would perhaps be able to recognize in them the intimates of the Marchioness: Niccolo da Correggio, Mario Equicola, Ercole Strozzi, Lorenzo da Pavia.

In any case we can recognize the ideal place in which they are: it is that meadow “lush with grass and enriched with flowers of many colours, those dark groves in reverent solitude, that beautiful

fountain ingeniously hidden in the living rock," which Pietro Bembo describes as the ideal pleasure-ground at the beginning of his *Asolani*

All this is not good painting, but it is something we look at for a long time — it carries our thoughts into a far-away country into which there enter none of the realities of life. The Roman warrior and the huntress Diana keep good watch. Nothing here is for use. No action can have its logical sequel. By some marvellous chance, all the figures are looking out of the picture — and these souls, unaware of each other, unaware of their own selves too, so it seems, form an ideal wreath for the woman who desired to reign in the kingdom of pure thought.

We have not got, in writing, the *invenzione* of the *Parnassus*, for Mantegna was at Mantua under the Marchioness's own eyes when he painted it, and so, in deciphering its meaning we are reduced to our own guesswork.

On top of a strange rock, pierced so as to form a natural arch, a young man in armour and a naked young woman, are standing upright, their shoulders touching and their heads turned amorously towards each other. Below them nine young school-girls are dancing a sort of round dance, and their little feet tap the ground with much more spirit than is displayed in their faces. A measure is being played for them by a poor devil of a harpist seated in a corner. In the other corner a sorry nag, with a coat like a bear's, with spots like a peacock, and wings like a hen, is looking at his

master in tender reproach for having disguised him so ridiculously before bringing him into such fine company. A few minor incidents enliven this part of the countryside still further : a mischievous boy, who has no right to be here at all, is aiming his pea-shooter at the nose of a poor troglodyte, who is no doubt preparing his supper on a little fire and who is defending himself as best he can and uttering his curses at the same time. . . . In the foreground a small rabbit with its ears erect is waiting to come out of its hole when all this din is over.

Now the rock is Parnassus, the school-girls are the nine Muses, the poor harpist is Apollo, who is playing on his lyre, the woolly horse is Pegasus, led by Mercury, whose whip is a wand. . . . As for the two lovers perched on their great rock, decorated for the occasion as French stands are decorated for public balls on 14th July, they represent Mars and Venus, whilst in the unfortunate man being shot at by an urchin's pea-shooter, we are expected to see Vulcan being flouted by Cupid. . . .

And yet the thing is delightful, all the same. The infinite grace of the gestures, the perfect rhythm of arms and legs, the soft draping of the scarves, the harmonious balance of the grouping, more than make up for the absurdity of the fable's moral. The symbolical theme disappears and we are only conscious of the rhythm of the forms—and that rhythm is divine. It deifies one of Isabella d'Este's passions, and one of her triumphs—the dance : that music in gestures which she

was taught at the age of six by the Jew Ambrosia, and at eleven by the famous Lorenzo Lavagnolo, which she studied in the *Trattato di Ballo* or in the *Ballerino perfetto*, and which she practised almost all her life. The central figure—the Muse with her face turned towards us and her hands clasped behind her back—may or may not have Isabella's features but it is surely Isabella's passion which is inspiring the whole group of goddesses and making them skim the ground with their quivering, sensitive feet. Never perhaps by any painter, not even by Raphael, has the "Spirit of the Dance" been so cleverly interpreted Yet it was enough for Isabella d Este to have had a hand in its composition for it to be less perfect than Mantegna's other works For this much must be noted the weak points of the picture are the symbolical and supererogatory figures—these latter are due, then, to the exactions of Mantegna's sovereign

Wherefore the painters, from one end of the peninsula to the other, did their utmost to avoid her Overcome with joy at first, at being commissioned by so great and learned a lady to decorate her *Grotta*, they were filled with dismay as soon as her orders arrived

"I have been at Bellini's house these last few days," wrote Pietro Bembo to her, in a letter from Venice dated 1 January, 1506

He is quite prepared to oblige Your Excellency provided that you send him the dimensions of the canvas. But the *invenzione*, with the design corresponding to it, must agree with the idea of the artist who is to execute the work. Bellini does not want to

be given a number of arbitrary limitations which would thwart his usual conceptions. He says that he is in the habit of going his own way about his work and that he guarantees to give satisfaction to anyone who looks at it .

In actual fact it is not with the inventions of the Marchioness that he was destined to "satisfy" us. For three years he turned Isabella d'Este's "invention" over and over in his mind, and ended by declaring :

"Nothing can be done with this story."

Her indignation against Bellini was not lessened by the fact that the old Master was ill-advised enough to suggest to her that in place of her allegory she should have a *Nativity*! A *Nativity*? What did she want with a *Nativity*? What could such a subject prove? In what way could it be in keeping with the sequence of her allegories? She had a plan, worked out long before, and that plan must be followed. She could not see why an artist could not transpose her idea for her, there and then, in design and colour, as a humanist translated phrases for her.

"Ah, if only painters were as quick as poets!" she sighed on receiving a *scenario* which she had asked for from Paride de Ceresara. For her, in fact, the meaning of a picture was everything, and its technique was a nuisance which dulled, complicated and delayed the transcription.

This contempt for the painter's "technique" or "medium" was to break out in still more memorable circumstances. It was in 1506. Pope Julius II was at Bologna with his whole Pontifical

Court, and was thinking of visiting Mantua. Wherefore it was necessary to prepare everything for his reception. The Marquis Gonzaga, at the moment with His Holiness, wrote, then, to his wife to remind her that the frescoes by Mantegna in the *Sala degli Sposi* badly needed restoring, and that she ought to set about it at once.

"Employ Mantegna and his sons on the job," he said. "And if they cannot or will not do the work, have it done by Francesco Bonsignori."

Mantegna could not do it, as a matter of fact, because he happened to be dead. Nevertheless, brighter colours were hastily daubed over the old Master's work and the sacrilege which to-day calls forth the indignation of every journal in the world was carried out with the utmost complacency by Isabella d'Este.

Let it be admitted, then. This woman, celebrated in every history of art for her artistic taste, was not artistic. She was one of those who try to understand what should only be felt. She loved works of art not for the sensory effect which they produced in her, but for the ideas which they put into her mind. She regarded pictures merely as specially animated devices or as unusually allusive coats of arms. They were, for her, a better means of bringing before her eyes the visions she had of an ideal life—a life in which vice was no longer victorious, in which virtue was triumphant and in which all baseness had fled across its swamps bearing its impotence away with it and hiding its ugliness—in short the exact opposite of what she

saw around her. . . . Each era places this ideal life where it pleases. We place it either in the future, as do the sociologists and ideologists, or in distant countries, as artists eagerly do, or in the past. In common with all her age Isabella d'Este placed it in the past—in mythological antiquity, where the gods triumphed without any difficulty over evil and ugliness.

Hence her enthusiasm for these classic formulæ, for these out-of-date allegories, for these complicated histories, which we find so cold and empty if they are not supported by an artist of genius. For her, antiquity was not only a treasury of beauty : it was an ideal of virtue, true loyalty and generosity—of everything which her contemporaries lacked. She could imagine a better humanity only as one in the raiment of the Greek gods and living under their moral code. Mythology was her compensation for life. Apollo with his harmony as a compensation for the libellers and sowers of discord : Minerva, with her wisdom, for Lucrezia Borgia : Truth with her mirror, for Cæsar Borgia. This is the explanation of what the painters did at her command. She loved the dance, so she commissioned the *Parnassus* from Mantegna. She loved music, so she commissioned first Mantegna and then Costa to paint the *Comus*. She loved poetry and conversation : she ordered what is now called *The Court of Isabella d'Este*. She abhorred trickery, brutality, luxury and idleness : she commissioned Mantegna to do the *Wisdom Victorious over the Vices* and Perugino to

do the *Triumph of Chastity*, then Correggio to do the *Apollo and Marsyas* and the *Virtues Arming Youth*, both of which also found a place in her *studiolο*. When one reminds oneself that she directed the composition of these "poetical inventions" in the midst of plots threatening the life of her husband, her son and her brother, after plagues which had carried off a third of the inhabitants of Mantua, on a soil incessantly shaking under the tread of invasions and under a sky rent with the fulminations of the Vatican, one begins to look at them in rather a different light, and one no longer finds them cold and banal. They have the proud elegance of a bouquet plucked under the enemy's fire.

They have, in short, the charm of a confidence. They were not painted, as are our modern pictures, for broad daylight, for the public, for an "exhibition," but for her own tiny little rooms, which she had built for herself, her *Camerini* into which only her intimates penetrated, and which were scarcely larger than blue and gold caskets, squeezed into a corner of the vast *Reggia*, as shrines of secret hopes and a dreamed-of Paradise. She ordered her pictures as she ordered her devices—those mysterious *imprese* which she put everywhere on the ceiling, as constellations, on her dresses, picked out in pearls, as embroidery, under her feet, as earthenware tiles. The artists found her themes incomprehensible—it was enough for her that she herself understood them. They were the mother tongue of her memories, her

desires, her regrets, as are those messages which one sends oneself across the years, in arraying the souvenirs of one's life and the books in one's room on an ordered plan which no one else can explain. . . . She was a prisoner in her age and a prisoner in her world, dreaming of extensions of justice and kindness which she could only perceive in the countries of the gods : and so she covered her boudoir with inscriptions, devices and images, as prisoners cover the walls of their cells : inscriptions which, doubtless were less sad than those of her unfortunate brother-in-law Ludovic the Moor on the walls of his dungeon at Loches, but which proved, none the less, an immense desire for expansion and liberty. She was like a chimera, spreading its wings, striking with its talons and hurling itself against the walls of its cage. . . . But is that the true rôle of Art ? No, undoubtedly. Yet it is a rôle which is as noble as it is rare, and one cannot but admire so pathetic a mistake.

## § 2. *Her Portraits.*

We can guess from the foregoing what her portrait-painters had to endure. To paint a beautiful lady's portrait is always an hazardous undertaking : it becomes a desperate one if the lady prides herself on her taste, and adds to the natural exigencies of her own vanity those of some theory of æsthetics. The greatest Masters are no more spared than are any others and no prestige is great enough to overawc their clients. So long as it is a question of mythology or of the sainthood,

of ceilings or altar-screens, of decorative symbols or general aspects of humanity, people are willing enough to praise the artists and even to launch out into courteous enthusiasm and though such and such a *Muse* may seem anaemic, or such and such a *Genius* goitrous or such and such a *Thinker* imbecile-looking, nobody looks too closely. Compliments are bandied about and the artist ascends into the clouds. But in the matter of portraits everyone is anxious to save his own stake—that is to say, his head! The smallest mistakes on the part of the artist are examined in detail. He is brought down to earth and made to feel that he is merely a tradesman like any other man, and that "beauty" and "likeness" are qualities guaranteed on the invoice.

"*Ah, how difficult it is to find painters who really hit off a natural likeness!*" exclaimed Isabella d'Este in a letter to the Countess d'Acerra. Observe that this letter is dated 1493, that is to say at a moment when all the great Masters were painting—Mantegna, Carpaccio, Pinturicchio, Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Ghirlandajo, Bellini. In the end she decided to try Mantegna. She wrote to Jacopo d'Atri:

In order to satisfy Her Most Illustrious Ladyship, the Countess d'Acerra, whom we dearly love, we have decided to have our portrait painted by Andrea Mantegna and we will ask him to send it you so that you may offer it to the Countess before you leave. We hope that you will bring us her portrait, as she wished to have ours.

Now Mantegna was the glorious creator of the *Sala degli Sposi* at Mantua and of the *Eremitani*

at Padua. It was he who decorated the gloomy walls of the *Castello* and painted on the ceiling that blue vault, surrounded by charming heads, which Titian afterwards declared to be "the most beautiful thing he had ever seen." When Mantegna appeared in the dark fortress, with his long brushes in his hand, everything was gay and animated : he seemed to be holding a bundle of sunbeams. But no sooner was he confronted with the great Marchioness, his sovereign, than he broke down : he was treated simply as a workman with whom the job to be done was being discussed. Nor was it merely a question of discussion : he met with point blank refusal.

"We were very grieved at not being able to send you our portrait," continued Isabella d'Este, still addressing the Countess d'Acerra, "but the painter has done it so badly that it is not in the least like us. But we have now sent to find a foreign artist who is supposed to be able to do a good likeness, and as soon as he has finished we will send it to Your Ladyship."<sup>1</sup>

This foreign artist was none other than Giovanni Santi, of Urbino, the father of Raphael. But he had no more success than the native had.

MOST ILLUSTRIOS MADAM AND VERY DEAR SISTER,

To satisfy Your Ladyship and not because our face is beautiful enough to deserve being painted, we are sending you, by Simone da Canossa, a portrait on a panel, by Zohan de Sancte,

<sup>1</sup> "Perche il pittore ne ha tanto mal facta che non ha alcune de le nostre simiglie havemo mandato per uno forestere, quel ha fama de contrafare bene el naturale."

painter to the Duchess of Urbino, who has a reputation for producing good likenesses, although after all we have heard, it seems that this one might well be more like us than it is.

A few months afterwards Isabella of Aragon was wanting a portrait of the Marchioness. Who should paint her this time? Mantua had failed, and so had Urbino. She decided to try Parma. The painter, Gian Francesco Maineri, took all possible pains, but alas! with no more success. When the portrait was finished Isabella sent it to Milan by Negro, the cavalry commander, but in asking permission of Ludovic the Moor to offer this souvenir to Isabella of Aragon she did not hide her vexation

I am afraid of irritating not only Your Highness, but the whole of Italy, with all these portraits of me, but I could not refuse the Duchess's urgent request. I am sending this, although it is not very like me it shows me as being rather fatter than I am.

Thus, then, every painter who had attempted her portrait from the life had failed. Supposing someone tried painting her without seeing her? It was her sister, Lucrezia d'Este, the wife of Annibal Bentivoglio, who had this brilliant idea. She undertook to carry it out at Bologna, where she was reigning, with the help of Francia. The Marchioness sent a sketch, or drawing, guided by which Francia tried to paint her portrait. Lucrezia stood behind him and instructed him regarding the colouring and expression. They tried twice

<sup>1</sup> Ritrovandomi questo anchor non mi sia molto simile, per essere uno poco piu grasso che non sono io. "

and failed. The painter ended by dispensing with Lucrezia's instructions and produced, from his own imagination, a portrait which he sent to Isabella. This time she was delighted :

"Truly you have made me much more beautiful by your art than nature ever did. . . . But the eyes are too dark. . . ."

All this praise just to arrive at that ! Isabella asked Lucrezia if the painter could not touch them up and make them lighter.

One can imagine the astonishment of the people at Bologna when they received this letter !

Lucrezia replied :

Our painter, Francia, is in the seventh heaven, so great is his joy at hearing that his portrait pleased Your Excellency and even more so at hearing that his art has made you more beautiful than nature did "It would be," he says, "a great impertinence on the part of the art of painting to presume to surpass nature" Nevertheless he is in no way hurt at receiving so great a compliment from such a lady ! As for altering the eyes from dark to light, the result would be doubtful and it would be with great regret that he would run the risk of spoiling what is best in the picture and of exchanging what is certainly good for what would be uncertain It would be necessary to alter the shading of the picture to suit the colour of the eyes and then to revarnish it, and if the eyes were spoiled by that operation the picture would lose all its charm However, if you could be here to pose for him he would do his best to please Your Excellency . . .

"I ! Pose !" cried Isabella d'Este. "Never !"

For this woman, who had recourse to all the Masters of Italy, and was taking every step to get a portrait of herself which was a real likeness, was very averse to tying herself down to the one man who could offer her some hope of succeeding. In



PLATE XIV



THE PARNASSUS AND THE DANCE OF THE MUSES  
By Mantegna, in the Louvre Allegory ordered by Isabella d'Este for her Grotta  
To face p 221

1511 Lucrezia Bentivoglio wanted to send Francia to her at Mantua and asked her if she would grant him a few hours' sitting Isabella replied

" Let Your Ladyship not insist further ! The last time we had our portrait done we experienced such boredom with the necessity of having to remain rigid and motionless that we will never let it happen to us again "

Such were the Mæcenas of this great epoch, such was the co-operation which they vouchsafed to the artists ! We ask ourselves sometimes when we are looking at these wonderful portraits of Renaissance women, in which everything—life, youth and beauty—is united—we ask ourselves what their lips, which still look so fresh, would say if they could speak. We need ask no more, for now we know They would open to pour curses on the painter of the portrait !

### § 3 *Her Collection*

It constantly happens that a mind which is incapable of conceiving the essential conditions of a given art can yet appreciate a work of art once it has been created and especially so if time has already given it a reputation A bad counsellor such as this can be an excellent amateur It was so with Isabella d'Este. She was, perhaps, the earliest of the great collectors, and she was certainly the keenest. Nowadays a person is a collector for a hundred different reasons, of which the least important, possibly, is a taste for what he is collecting But in her days this last was the only

reason, and although the great Marchioness was neither the first nor the only person to search for beautiful antiques, her passion cannot be attributed either to a spirit of imitation or to one of gain.

And then what a period for collectors it was ! Imagine the eyes of the men of the XVIth century when they saw raised from the earth the harvest of marbles which now fills the Vatican ! Some festivals are recurrent, but the world has only once seen a sight such as this. A nation of statue-makers was at work, several generations had exhausted themselves in attempting to give such and such a stone or such and such a bronze the effect of life, of movement, of strength, of bold gesture and flowing drapery and a fine balance of line and mass ; and to express the play of muscles and healthy vigour in poses which would do honour to the human body—not counting all kinds of experiments made to discover a process by which a bronze could be obtained in a single casting, with all its details reproduced to a nicety. And suddenly, while they were seeking, as their fathers and forefathers had sought before them—those designers of the hard, stiff features in the cathedrals which we admire but which they did not because they wanted to go still farther—the thing they had been dreaming of sprang from the ground—the ideal group which they had been striving to achieve leapt up at them, radiant, young, perfect, complete, faultless. The *Apollo* was unearthed in a farm at Grotta Ferrata, belonging to Cardinal de la Rovere. The river-god,

the *Tiber with the She-Wolf suckling Romulus and Remus* was discovered in the foundations of a house near the Dominican convent at Santa Maria Sopra Minerva. The *Laocoön* was pulled out of the Tiber under the very eyes of Michael Angelo A peasant, digging in his garden in the Campo di Fiori, brought to light the *Hercules Holding the Child with the Lion's Skin*! One could not use a pickaxe without laying bare a masterpiece

It was as though the dead lying underground had at last taken pity on the efforts of the living, and were gradually pushing the work of their own hands towards them, as much as to say "We have already found what you are looking for Here it is."

Nevertheless the business of collecting was not without its struggles or its danger It was necessary, first of all, to guard against fakes, for easy though it was to find antiques by excavating, people began to think that it was even easier to make them, or else fraud had an attraction which discovery had not, for forgers abounded On one occasion one of them succeeded in selling to Cardinal Riario as a Greek piece a marble which was fresh from the studio of the young Michael Angelo On another an antiquary in Rome named Raphael, who came from Urbino but had no connection with the great painter, despatched to Isabella d'Este, as antiques, two little figures which were the work of an obscure contemporary Wherefore she took great precautions and mobilized all her friends in order to have all the objects which

were offered her examined. There is a certain antique vase, haggled over at public auction, on which a label bearing the following words might have been put :

Sale : LORENZO THE MAGNIFICENT

Valuer : LEONARDO DA VINCI

Purchaser : ISABELLA D'ESTE

There is only the price, 150 ducats, or scarcely more than 7,000 francs at their present value [1913], and that would make our modern connoisseurs smile in pity.

Then one had to be careful not to allow oneself to be forestalled. The English were already in the field, and by means of their money were carrying off everything. In April 1529, after the sack of Rome, the poet Molza, ruined and forced to sell his library, wrote to Isabella d'Este's son, Cardinal Ercole :

If Your Excellency does not buy these books they will certainly go to England, which God forbid so long as the Cardinal of Mantua is alive !

Finally, if one had a modest income and an extravagant husband with a taste for racing, one had to pay as little as possible. In the battle for masterpieces which is always being waged by amateurs there are three ways of winning : by force, by ruse and by love. Force implies gold ; ruse implies waiting and furtive appropriation ; love implies gradually insinuating into the heart of the artist or the former owner the idea that his work will never be made so much of as by oneself,

and that a beautiful thing is only beautiful in the house of someone who loves it Those who win by force are the rich people , by ruse, the diplomats , and by love, the artists The first are proud of having paid a very high price , the second are equally proud of having paid a very low one , but the last are not proud at all, but simply happy in the possession of a long-coveted object.

Since human nature is complex and vanity may take many forms, it often happens that the same collector may be at once rich, crafty and enthusiastic and therefore that he acquires glory just as much through having spent a great deal on a picture—which does honour to his purse—or through having spent very little—which does honour to his skill—and also that, after all, he does not absolutely detest the art which he pretends to love. But it is very rare for one of these characteristics not to dominate the others entirely, and not to subordinate them to such an extent that they are completely effaced Dealers and pawnbrokers exist thanks to the two former But it is the last who keep the artists alive by creating that atmosphere of adoration and ecstasy which enables them to breathe.

Isabella d'Este was one of the last kind She was obliged to be economical, and of all the weapons which she used to acquire the treasures in her collection, gold was certainly the feeblest. She would use threats upon occasion, since she was half a Sovereign and often a Regent—but of what avail were threats from a distance? On other

occasions she would become insinuating, coaxing, promising, eloquent or pathetic. Her correspondents and her buyers were everywhere : at Rome she had Cristoforo Romano and Baldassare Castiglione ; at Venice, Zorzo Brognolo, Lorenzo da Pavia and Michele Vianello ; at Bologna, Casio and her own son, Ercole ; at Florence, Francesco Malatesta and Fra Pietro da Novellera ; at Ferrara, Zoliolo and Calipupi ; in France, sometimes the same Zoliolo ; in Greece, Fra Sabba da Castiglione. Occasionally she would mobilize all her friends—and she had some of them even as far away as Ireland. What she had least of was money. But then her genius supplemented her purse. She watched the sales after deaths, after revolutions and after disasters, crept stealthily after retreating armies and descended upon corpses with the swiftness of a hawk.

Sentiment was as nothing when her desire for works of art was active. She was very fond of her brother-in-law, Ludovic the Moor, who was almost a religious devotee of her sister Beatrice d'Este, and who shared her tastes in art, luxury and elegance. Isabella had done everything that a woman could possibly have done to maintain him on the throne of Milan ; but in 1499, when she was about to welcome him with the greatest honour at Mantua, she heard of his fall and of his flight before the French. That fall was final : there was no use hoping for any return of fortune—and she knew it. She immediately wrote to Antonio Pallavicini, one of the men who had

betrayed her brother-in-law, to ask him to retrieve, amongst the disorder caused by the occupation by the French troops and the looting, a certain clavicord, a wonderful piece of work, which Lorenzo da Pavia had had made four years previously for his sister Beatrice Isabella, by dint of perseverance ended by getting it away from Milan and putting it in her collection

In the same way, after the fall and flight of the Bentivogli before Julius II, who had just invaded Bologna, her mind at once turned to what she could get out of them. She heard that the Pope had had their palace, recently decorated by Francia, razed to the ground, and that two very valuable marble busts, one of Antonia and one of Faustina, had disappeared while the looting was going on. The affection which she had for her sister Lucrezia Bentivoglio and her brother-in-law did not make her forget the two busts. She received the fugitives at Mantua, but through her agents she got on the track of the masterpieces, took possession of them and put them in her *Grotta*. Thus these disinherited princes had only to come to see her to be able to rejoice anew in their departed wealth!

She watched not only the fall of thrones, but the death of artists. The moment the news reached Mantua that Giorgione had breathed his last, she rummaged the whole of Venice to get hold of a certain picture, *Night*, "which," it was said, "the painter had left and which was very beautiful." When Niccolo da Correggio died at Ferrara, she wrote forthwith to his son, Gian

Galeazzo, to demand the manuscript of his father's work : poems which had long ago been dedicated to her, she assured him.

Your father showed the manuscript to me at the time of Duke Alfonso's marriage with his first wife Anna Sforza , we were in the room above the chapel, in the courtyard. He showed me his book, which was in three parts, containing the Sonnets, Capitoli and Canzoni, with an epistle dedicating each of these parts to me

After the sack of Rome, she did not fail to profit by the storm and collect some of the wreckage. Indeed, she collected so much of it, and so successfully, that it filled a whole ship ! But as it happened the ship was captured by pirates, and so she never received her treasures.

Generous and devoted in the ordinary way, she became, when it was a question of her collections, captious, distrustful and jealous. She did not like too many people to look at them and so, perhaps, to spoil them. She had an original copy of the singer Serafino's *Strambotti* and *Capitoli* which had been composed for her. Louis Gonzaga de Gazzuolo was very eager to transcribe a famous *capitolo*, *On Sleep* : she sent him a copy but begged him to keep it under lock and key and to allow no one to read it, as she did not want the verses to become public property. She had a Greek *Eustathium* which she lent to her cousin Cæsar of Aragon, asking him, however, not to let many people see it and thereby decrease its value. She was very ready to devote herself to her relations, and to give them everything she had —but never an article from her collection, never anything from her museum !

The day after the battle of Fornovo the cavalry looted Charles VIII's camp, and captured the fine tapestries which the King always took with him. The Marquis Gonzaga decided to send these wonderful hangings to his sister-in-law, Beatrice d'Este, with the object, no doubt, of getting himself into the good graces of Ludovic the Moor Isabella, horrified, did not actually refuse to obey him—but she did not obey him all the same, and avoided doing so in the following way.

Most Illustrious Lord,

Your Excellency has expressed a wish for me to send the four pieces of tapestry which belonged to the King of France so that you may present them to the Duchess of Milan. It goes without saying that I shall comply, but on this occasion I must say that I shall do so with great reluctance, for in my opinion these regal spoils ought to remain in our family to perpetuate the memory of your glorious deeds, of which we have no other souvenirs here. In giving them away to someone else you will appear to be relinquishing the honour of the enterprise at the same time as these trophies of victory. I am not sending them to you to-day, because I need a mule for the purpose and also because I hope that you will see your way to make some excuse to the Duchess, telling her, for instance, that you have already given these hangings to me. If I had not seen them, I should not be so eager to keep them, but as you gave them to me in the first place and as they were acquired at the risk of your life, I can only part with them with tears in my eyes. However, as I say, I shall obey Your Excellency, but I hope to have some explanation in your reply to me. Had the hangings been worth a thousand times more than they actually are, I should still have been glad, if they had been acquired in another way, to hand them over to my sister, the Duchess, whom I love as you know and whom I honour with all my heart. But in the circumstances I must confess that I find it very difficult to part with them.

MANTUA, 24 July, 1495

The story of the Urbino marbles is even more typical of her. In June 1502 Isabella d'Este was enjoying the pleasures of the country in her beautiful gardens at Porto. With her was her best friend, her sister-in-law, Elisabetta Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino. Suddenly the latter's husband, Guidobaldo, Duke of Urbino, appeared and dismounted from his horse half dead with fear and exhaustion, having ridden at full gallop from his own territory, which Cæsar Borgia had invaded and was now busy pillaging. He had saved nothing he said, except his life and his shirt !

This happened in peace time, between so-called allies, and with no declaration of war ; and the game had been particularly easy for the invader, seeing that Guidobaldo, to oblige him, had lent him his artillery. It was one of those tricks which earned for Cæsar Borgia the praises of Machiavelli. It was not destined to bring him happiness, it was true : but meanwhile, before virtue was avenged and the crime punished, Guidobaldo's subjects were held for ransom and massacred, and the palace which his father had filled with innumerable treasures—manuscripts, arms and works of art—was systematically plundered. Strings of mules were going down the mountain-side bearing the fruits of this fortunate enterprise to the Vatican—for the Popes of those days were patrons of the arts.

In this conjuncture, Isabella d'Este proved herself a kindly relation and a still better collector. As a relation she bestirred herself, received the fugitive willingly, wept over his misfortunes and gave

him shelter in her palace but as a collector she did not hesitate to profit by this windfall She remembered having seen at Urbino a fine antique torso of *Venus* and a beautiful *Cupid Asleep* which latter was not an antique—though it had formerly been sold as such to Cardinal Riario—but which was the work of a young Florentine sculptor named Buonarotti She had always coveted them Without losing a minute, she wrote to her brother Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, who was in Rome, to ask the Usurper to let her have the two pieces for her collection Caesar Borgia, gallant thief and obliging traitor, immediately despatched one of his men to Mantua with mules bearing the *Venus* and the *Cupid Asleep*, so that the Duke of Urbino saw arriving, as his sister-in-law's property, at the palace in which she was sheltering him, the two marbles which a month previously had been his own property and in his own palace.

So far her rôle as collector had not clashed with her rôle as friend But a day came when the two were sharply opposed to each other That day was when Guidobaldo had his estates restored to him after the fall of the Borgia, and recovered nearly all his treasures but Isabella took good care not to return his two antiques to him She had taken the precaution, before applying to the thief, to obtain authority to do so from the man who had been robbed, and she maintained that this consent absolved her from ever having to restore the stolen goods In fact, in these days of butchery and pillage, though one could sometimes

recover what a bandit had seized, one could never get back what a collector had appropriated !

Thus every disaster, every storm, brought its flotsam and jetsam to the charming wrecker, and a visitor—Castiglione or Pietro Bembo, for instance—passing through her *Grotta* could mentally visualize the martyrology of Italy. For her, when a crown fell, it was as though a necklace had become untied and she would lie down flat, if necessary, to pick up the unstrung pearls ; the death of an artist was, for her, a sale in perspective ; a town that was sacked meant the arrival of a mule loaded with treasure. But who can take too stern a view of her ? Was she not a collector ? Ruined families, forced sales, the collapse of races, the looting of monasteries, the flight of kings—it is in these that one finds the origins of every museum, public or private. A collection is only a cottage built from the débris of a hundred palaces.

And Isabella d'Este's own cottage has been destroyed and dispersed. Less than a century had passed since her death before her pictures, brought together with so much trouble, were sold by the then reigning Duke of Mantua, Vincenzo II, to King Charles I of England. The latter greatly appreciated them, and wrote on the inventory in his own hand, after each article which came from the famous collection : *Mantua piece*. But his palace was no safer a shelter. A few years later revolution broke out in England, the king was beheaded, his collections were sold, and Isabella d'Este's pictures scattered over the whole of

Europe. The precious things which had remained at Mantua had no happier fate. In 1630, when the city was sacked by the *lansquenets* of Ferdinand II, nearly all of them were looted, loaded on barges on the Mincio and taken away to be dispersed in any haphazard way. One comes across fragments of the collection everywhere nowadays in France, in Germany and, especially, in England. Hidden away in many of the castles of the United Kingdom there are, doubtless, remains from the *Grotta* and portraits of Isabella d'Este or of her friends, whose owners look at them without being aware of their identity. The remains of her famous "service" are scattered over the collections of Vienna and Paris. Her medals are in Vienna or in private collections. There is only one place where one will find nothing of hers—that is in her own palace.

#### § 4. *Her Palace at Mantua*

We are often told that works of art ought to be put back into the frames which first contained them. Renan has written passages on that subject which, though seldom read, are often quoted. Let us suppose, for a moment, that this were possible. Let us make it a dream—the day has come when every people has recovered the works of art which it brought forth. The side-pieces of the *Adoration* have gone back to Ghent,<sup>1</sup> the Elgin marbles have gone back to the Acropolis, the tomb of Julius II has been re-assembled, and all the *Virgins*

<sup>1</sup> These panels have now been returned to Ghent.—Translator's Note.

have been restored to their altars. We are permitted, therefore, to replace on the walls which they once illumined, the pictures which Mantegna, Perugino, Costa and Correggio painted for Isabella d'Este. We leave the palace of the Louvre, with its regularity and its order, with its courtyards filled with a constantly shifting crowd and its windows opening on to a busy river and with the rumbling noises of a modern city entering in gusts, and we carry our treasures across the plain of Lombardy, beyond Milan, beyond Brescia, to Mantua. We pass over the girdle of stagnant water which cuts it off from the rest of the world and follow the narrow, gloomy streets, flanked with dark arcades and dropsical houses leaning on their colonnades like old women on their crutches ; we enter this medley of castles—strong, empty, ruined and silent—mountains of mouldy bricks among the green waters of the moats on the shore of the lake over which passes the reflection of lazily moving clouds. . . . Where, now, are we to put these treasures ?

The rooms which the custodians show us with most pride—the *Salle des Fleuves*, the *Salle des Miroirs* and the *Salle des Marquis* might be the rooms of a casino in which we are surprised at not seeing the ghosts of gamblers round a phantom trente-et-quarante table. From the level of the cornice downwards there are rows of partially ruined statues, some of which are so chipped that their iron skeleton shows through. . . . There is nothing here to represent either the period or the

ideal of Isabella d'Este Not here, then, must we place the *Parnassus* or the *Wisdom Triumphant over the Vices* Let us go further, crossing the gardens and the inner courtyards and passing on to the most distant rooms of the most remote of these palaces. Everything is shabby, crumbling, falling For a hundred and fifty years the Austrians were quartered here—eating, drinking, smoking, cooking and making a mess of everything Where, then, can we hang our masterpieces? How can we find the exact spot for which they were intended, and where they were formerly placed?

This is not easy Isabella d'Este lived in three distinct suites in these palaces, each a long way away from the others. To see what remains of her first suite, the one in which she spent the thirty years of her marriage, that is to say, all her youth and part of her middle age, we must go to the far end of the palaces, right up to the shores of the *lago mezzo*, in the old, sombre *Castello*, the northern outpost of Mantua Two square towers, bristling with battlements, flank its extremities, one on the west the other on the east In the western one is the room decorated by Mantegna, the *Sala degli Sposi*, with its fine frescoes, in the eastern one there is nothing, but between the two a little salient juts out towards the lake like a cape We go down a few steps and suddenly a tiny room, with a cylindrical roof, attracts our attention This little closet, lighted by one narrow slit, looks more like a casemate than a boudoir Never-

theless, we feel as though we are entering a precious casket : under the vaulting we can see the remains of ultramarine and gold. The whole decoration is extraordinarily delicate, and consists of two alternating patterns which are the same throughout : a musical stave with notes representing semibreves, and sheaves of parchment strips bound with ribbons with flying ends. That is all that remains of Isabella d'Este's first suite, of that celebrated *studiolo* where she lived from the date of her marriage in 1490 until the death of her husband in 1520, and where she collected her first art treasures.

She was living there, unquestionably, when she ordered these Mantegnas of ours. But where are we to put them now ? Where are the rooms which could take them ? We would not be able to hang them in this closet, which is only eight feet wide, or narrow let us say, and which seems to be only a passage : which became, in fact, no more than a passage. At the end, where the little salient drops sheer to the lake, there was formerly another little palace. It was small and low and square, and was built during Isabella d'Este's lifetime for her sister-in-law, Princess Paleologue, and called for that reason the *Palazzino della Paleologa*. To go from the old *Castello* to this new palace, one had to pass through this precious casket. For several centuries, therefore, it was reduced to the rôle of an ordinary corridor. Then the *Palazzino della Paleologa* fell in ruins. It was demolished in 1899, and the vaulted room now stands by itself and is open to the air and light of heaven as it

was in Isabella's time. But everything that then went towards making the charm of the *studio* has nevertheless disappeared, and we must look elsewhere for an asylum for our pictures.

Shall it be the suite of small rooms or *camerini* whither she migrated when she left the old *Castello* in 1520, and where she died in 1539? This is the least ruined and the least restored part of the ancient palaces. It is in what is known as the *Corte Vecchia* on the first floor, with a view to the east over the lake. Let us go in. We find it very much as Isabella d'Este left it, and the soldiers and other tenants who occupied it subsequently have not succeeded in obliterating all traces of her. In the rest of the palaces there dwells only the wind—that and silence and solitude. But here we feel we are in somebody's home. The Italians were always inclined to build immense monuments and then to live in narrow cells within them, like rats in a liner, and they were equally inclined, on summits from which the view commanded the surrounding world, to reduce the light to whatever could filter through high-perched, inconvenient embrasures through which they could barely see the sky. We can note this craze in the home of the great Marchioness. These *camerini* are only a suite of little cells connected with one another and facing the lake. Not that there is anything about the lake which suggests the Italian lakes, or anything else Italian. A low-lying, wide-spread sheet of water, a long strip of sand at its edge, a long line of low trees on the sand, long

banks of clouds sweeping across it all and sometimes looking fleecy against the blue sky : it might almost be a Dutch landscape which one sees receding into the open distance, except that one knows that beyond, far away to the North, it is closed by the rocks and the lake sung by Virgil and Catullus. . . . There is nothing to see outside, but turn to the interior : here is the famous *Paradiso*, planned entirely by her and for her own use, after her husband's death. Seldom was a cell so lovingly decorated : never before have we seen such a confined space so profitably adapted for producing the maximum effect on the eyes and the mind.

The communicating door between the two principal *camerini* is a poem in marble of various colours. Fixed to the yellow, black or red framework of the doorway are medallions of white marble like the signet on seals, and on these medallions are carved miniature statues of extraordinary delicacy. They are attributed to Cristoforo Romano, and are certainly worthy of the greatest of the Masters. All Isabella d'Este's symbols are displayed on the framework of this door. Minerva stands leaning on her lance and shield, between a casing erected round a tree trunk and a symbolical olive-tree. Music is enthroned between reading desks and tablatures ; Orpheus is hanging his lyre on a tree ; a strange female figure, carrying books on her head, is kicking a skull as she runs. Two medallions of violet or lilac-coloured marble fixed in the middle of the door-posts, and a third, on the front of the

lintel, seem to have replaced the originals, which have been stolen or destroyed. But the delicate edging of white marble, carved in the shape of oak or acanthus leaves, still runs round these empty plaques. And in the thickness of the wall where the door opens, six other medallions repeat, like echoes, what the figures in the front are telling us. Behind Music is a bird—a nightingale, no doubt, with the inscription *χαρέ προχνη*, behind Orpheus is a monkey with a collarette and a mirror, behind Minerva, an owl, behind the mysterious figure who is defying Death with Books, a peacock, and finally, behind the empty medallions, a leopard and two pigeons—which set us guessing.

Let us look round us. The walls are covered with a veneer of the fine colour of a Cremona violin—yellow in the high lights, black in the shadows. Gradually we begin to see fantastic cities, high-piled palace architecture, musical instruments—a violin, a virginal, a lute. Some thought or other is expressed in every corner. Slips of various kinds of wood are arranged to represent a musical stave, and in the stave are the notes of a French air which was popular in the XVIth century. The first words are inscribed *Prendes sur moy*, and the name of the famous Flemish musician, Okenghem, is added. Elsewhere, on a little banner, bellying out like a sail, we can easily read ISAB, and below ELLA. There are more “inventions” and “symbolical décor” in these panels than there are in a whole sideboard by Gallé.

If we look up at the vaulting we again find ourselves under the influence of her mysterious thoughts. In a skein of tarnished gold on a background of dull blue, cyphers, stems and leaves of acanthus or laurel, ribbons and knots twine and untwine, blend and separate so that they seem as confused as the roof of branches in a forest. Then little by little we begin to recognize symbols there, just as on a starry night we distinguish the different constellations. Here is the  $\alpha$  and the  $\omega$ , the beginning and the end of all things ; here are the stacks of cards in *Lotto*, symbols of that chance which rules human destinies ; here is a triangular candelabra with only one light left burning, which recalls, with its letters U.T.S. the device chosen by the Marchioness in those sombre hours when there remained to her nothing but hope—*unum in tenebris sufficit* : here is the musical stave with the strange clefs and the mysterious notes which no one has ever been able to decipher, and of which the Marchioness was so fond that she had it reproduced in pearls on her dresses. Here, finally, the XXVII which proclaims the defeated sects, VINTE SETTE, and everywhere, in every kind of form, the device which dominated the whole life she led here : NEC SPE, NEC METU . . . NEC SPE, NEC METU. . . . We are indeed in the home of Isabella d'Este.

But where shall our pictures go ? Were they ever here ? Yriarte thought so : he even worked out a plan for reconstituting the *Paradiso*, with an imaginary replacement of all its works of art.

But the panels of these *camerini*, now filled with worthless decorations, were obviously always too small to take our paintings. They never did contain them. Our Mantegnas would look very well here, in her home, but they would not be in their own. So we must find some other asylum for them.

Let us retrace our steps through the labyrinth of the Reggia and make for the Marchioness' third suite, which was not one in which she lived but which she used for receptions and for her collection. Let us search for what might have been her museum. One set of rooms succeeds another, the corridors stretch out interminably in the darkness, though they are sometimes cut by a bay open to the sun and the wind. A foot-step on the flagstones awakens far-away echoes high up in the vaulting, which soon go lazily to sleep again. It is only a false alarm, life will never again return to animate this gigantic skeleton of brick and stone. We are on the point of asking ourselves what giants built these walls when suddenly we are obliged to lower our heads and crouch in order to pass into a suite of Lilliputian rooms. What can this be? A gaol with a refinement of torture for prisoners whom it was desired to humble? No, it is too ornate, too elegant for such a purpose. Then we remember the words in a letter of this period in which Isabella's diversions are described: "Then Morgan-tino and Delta came in. They danced and jumped about together and performed strange antics with their tiny bodies." We are in the home of the

dwarfs ! Here was housed that race which was so carefully preserved at the Mantuan Court, and from which presents for foreign princesses were chosen, just as princes were given presents of horses specially selected from the stud.

I promised Mme Renée four years ago [wrote Isabella], to send her the first daughter born to my dwarfs. The *puttina* is now two and will unquestionably remain a dwarf, though one cannot hope that she will be as small as my Delia. The child can now walk alone without assistance, if the Duchess still wants to have her.

This, then, was the little suite which had been constructed to suit their height. Being of no use to anyone, it has been respected by every invader. It is the one thing in the vast palace which is intact. . . . But we cannot hang our pictures here. And so we must continue our search, rather obsessed now by the droll vision of these artificial beings and by the queerly solemn sound of the words : “*Then Morgantino and Delia came in. . . .*”

At last, on the ground floor, we come upon a courtyard full of shrubs and enriched by a little marble temple. This is known as the *Cour des Quatre Platanes*. A wide gallery runs all along this neglected garden and opening on to the gallery is a suite of rooms in which the Austrians installed their Scalcheria (chancellor’s office) during their occupation. At the end of these rooms we find an open courtyard, a ruined *Cortile*, with its paving stones uprooted and replaced by grass, the friezes destroyed, holes in the wall which must

once have been niches for statues, and where a few remains of mosaic are still shining. If we look carefully we will eventually be able to pick out, round the frieze which has been worn away by the wind, baked by the sun, blackened by the rain, pulled to bits by lizards and broken through everywhere, the letters making up these words at the beginning ISABELLA ESTENSIS and at the end FECIT A PARTU VIRGINIS MDXXII. We have arrived at last! This, in very truth, is the place of which the poet Toscana wrote

The place which the world calls the Grotta  
Hides in its rich bosom  
All that is most precious in lovely Italy;  
The Magnanimous Isabella d'Este  
Built it and decorated it wonderfully  
Five rooms it has, and of these two  
Are destined to harbour works of art.

This time, without any possible doubt whatever, we are on the ground and beneath the sky where our Louvre pictures spent their youth. Here are the two rooms described by Toscana. Here, on the right of the window, was the *Incoronazione* or *Court of Isabella d'Este*, by Lorenzo Costa, the *Lotta di Amorini e di Ninfe* by Perugino here was the *Parnassus* by Mantegna, which was also known as *Venere con Vulcano ed Orfeo*, here was the *Virtu che scaccia i Vizi*, by Mantegna, and finally, perhaps here, certainly near here, and assuredly in the same palace, were Correggio's *Antiope* and Titian's *Entombment*!

<sup>1</sup> According to the inventory of 2 August 1542 drawn up by Odoardo Stuvmi, notary Cf. A. Patricolo *Guida del Palazzo Ducale Mantova* 1908

If, in places where souls once lived strenuously, something of their faces could remain, and if our memory of them could materialize them for us, as a sunbeam lights up the minute particles of matter suspended in air, we would perhaps see appearing here the round head of Baldassare Castiglione from the Louvre, the thin, bony head of Machiavelli from the Bargello, the bald skull and floating beard of Pietro Bembo, the receding forehead of Ariosto, the round face of Niccolo da Correggio, the solemn cranium of Titian, the divine profile of Leonardo, the secretive muzzle of Ludovic the Moor, the protruding jaw of Charles-Quint. Everyone who loved, everyone who suffered, everyone at the threshold of the XVIth century who foresaw a more complex life or desired a better humanity passed by here, pondered before the pictures which we now see in the Louvre, and looked at our dancing Muses, our dreaming Apollo, our little Cupids tumbling about on dragonflies' wings, our philosophers conversing, our Minerva fighting with the Vices or with Venus. For these sketches of the ideal life once brightened the ruins which we see to-day.

We could hang them here, then, in imagination, but what sort of life would be theirs? They would be isolated, expatriated, lost. In Isabella d'Este's time these rooms were filled to overflowing with marbles, bronzes, cameos, crystals and rare books, almost all of them mythological. Everything was in terms of the gods. The very flagstones of the *Cortile*, made of coloured tiles, were

little symbolical pictures. Sometimes one set one's foot on a pattern of torches, suggesting the tower of Babel, with the mysterious inscription AMUMOC, which intimates of the d'Este household knew to mean *amomos* or *immaculata*, sometimes on an iron gauntlet surrounded with the motto *buena fe non es mudable*, sometimes on the wick of a lighted torch with a dove and the motto *vrai amour ne se change*, sometimes on a blazing sun darting his rays in all directions, with the motto *per un dextrum*.

People were handling editions newly printed by Aldo Manuzio, and fingering articles of ivory, marble, wood and crystal—everything that it was a treat to touch. We have returned, it is true, to the right place, geographically speaking, but its æsthetic surroundings have disappeared. When we glance at the walls of the *Scalcheria*, it is in vain that we look for the manuscripts which delighted Ariosto or Bembo and when we feel with our feet for the famous tiled *pavimento*, covered with the Gonzaga devices, we find only trefoil. It is the Boulevard Haussmann over again.<sup>1</sup>

But patience! Chance, which amuses itself in constructing as well as in destroying, has gradually reassembled the best of the wreckage of Isabella's collection and brought it by degrees to port in the Louvre. The mythological paintings by Mantegna, Perugino and Costa, bought by Cardinal

<sup>1</sup> At the Hôtel Edouard André now the Jaquemart André Museum. A restoration of this *Caville* was attempted a little while ago, but however exact the reconstruction may have been it could not replace the objects seen and touched by Isabella d'Este and now irrevocably lost.

Richelieu soon after the sack of Mantua, which they escaped, and brought to the castle of Plessis, came thence to the Louvre. In 1797 the *Madonna of Victory*, taken by the troops from the chapel of Via San Simone, came to join them. The persons who surrounded the great Marchioness and who formed part of her “collection of souls” are also near by. The portrait of her friend Baldassare Castiglione, by Raphael, is in the *Salon Carré*, in place of the *Gioconda*.<sup>1</sup> That of her son Federico, by Titian, is not far away, and is busy looking at a beautiful lady between two mirrors. What is presumed to be a portrait of one of her admirers, the beautiful Lucrezia Crivelli, the mistress of Ludovic the Moor, is in the *Salle du Bord de l'Eau* under the pseudonym of *Belle Ferrionnière*. The bust of her sister, Beatrice d'Este, by Cristoforo Romano, is on the ground floor, also in a room on the river side, and is marked “by Michael Angelo.” Finally here she is herself, in this Paris which she so longed to see and in this very Louvre of which she had heard so much, breathing that air of sociability without which, it seems, she could not live. The second life which a portrait gives its model is sometimes the life of which that model dreamed. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Now restored to the Louvre.—Translator's Note.





THE MADONNA OF VICTORY  
By Mantegna, in the Louvre

*THE MADONNA OF VICTORY  
IN THE LOUVRE*

Authentic portrait in this picture :—

Gian Francesco Gonzaga, fourth Marquis of Mantua, Captain-General of the Armies of the Venetian Government, represented at the age of twenty-nine, on his knees and in armour.

Presumed portrait in this picture :—

Osanna dei Andreasi, known as *La Beata Osanna*, a Dominican nun and a relation of the Gonzaga, who died in 1505 and was beatified by Leo X in 1515, represented as Saint Elizabeth, kneeling

Other authentic portraits of the Marquis Gian Francesco Gonzaga —

1st. By Mantegna, at the age of seven, the little boy, standing, wearing dull purple with white shoulder knots and parti-coloured hose, red and white and blue, in the fresco *The Cardinal's Return*, representing Ludovic Gonzaga and his sons and grandsons, in the *Sala degli Sposi*, in the Castello Vecchio, in Mantua.

2nd By Sperandio di Bartolomeo de' Savelli, at the age of twenty-nine, a bronze medal struck at the same time as the picture *The Madonna of Victory* was painted Bust, in left profile, with a little cap and a cuirass, inscription *Franciscus Gonzaga Mantua, marchio ac. veneti exerc imp* On the reverse, the same figure, on horseback, with the inscription *ob restitutam Italæ libertatem — Opus Sperandei*

3rd By Bartolomeo Melioli As a younger man Bronze medal Bust in right profile, wearing a little cap and a cuirass and with his hair long Inscription *D Franciscus Gon D Fred III M Mantua F Spes Pub Salus Q P redivi* On the reverse, a woman, with her right hand resting on a spear and her left hand holding a muzzle on which is the inscription *cautius* At her feet water and fire. Inscription *Adolescentia Augustæ meliolus dicavit*

4th By Ruberto Young A medal, possibly dating from 1484 Bust in left profile, with a cap and armour, and the inscription *Franciscus Marchio Mantua III* On the reverse, Roman cavalry in battle with the inscription *Faveat fortis — epo — 10 Fr ruberto opus*

5th By Talpa, at about twenty-nine years of age, a bust in left profile, bearded, long-haired, wearing a square cap Inscription *Franciscus Gon Man Mar. III* On the reverse, Curtius hurling himself into the abyss, with the inscription *. universæ Italæ liberatori Bartolus Talpa*

6th By an unknown hand, when about thirty Large bust in clay, the head bare and the hair long, with a richly chased cuirass on which appear the eagle of the Empire, a figure holding a temple with the inscription *Jam Templum* and the *crogiolo* or allegorical crucible In the Museo Patrio in Mantua

7th By Bonsignori Half-length oil painting, wearing a cuirass, with the head bare and carrying a general's bâton (Bresanelli Collection, in Mantua)

8th The bronze equestrian statuette attributed to Sperandio. (In the Louvre )

## *THE MADONNA OF VICTORY IN THE LOUVRE*

I

### *THE LEAGUE*

IN MANTUA there was once a poor Jew—by which is meant a Jew who was rich but whom nobody liked—and that is the extreme of poverty. His name was Daniele Norsa. He was a banker, and was doing very well in his business. On this particular occasion—it was in the year 1495—he had taken a fancy to a house situated at the beginning of the Via San Simone (now the Via Domenico Fornelli) in the northern part of the town not far from the marshes which have since been drained and made into a square—the Piazza Virgiliana. There was, however, one definite objection to the house being occupied by a Jew: on the wall there was an ancient fresco of a Madonna, and the customs of the times did not authorize such promiscuity for the Blessed Virgin! So our friend took precautions: he obtained permission from the bishop, on payment of a certain sum, to have the Madonna removed—which was a wise thing to do—but having paid, he thought himself immune from all danger—which was not so wise!

One fine day in May, on Ascension Eve, people

## *Celebrities of the Italian Renaissance*

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passing his house in a procession noticed that on the wall, in place of the Madonna, there were some very unedifying drawings and a most profane inscription which certain evil-minded persons had just chalked up. Nobody doubted that this was the Jew's work.

The crowd shouted "Sacrilege! Sacrilege!" and everything else that one can imagine such a crowd shouting.

The procession halted and a shower of stones rattled against the banker's windows. For a moment the house was in danger of being sacked by the throng of the Faithful, all, no doubt, animated by a generous impulse to avenge their Madonna and also, possibly, by the hope of getting rid of an importunate creditor. At any rate, he was only saved by the arrival of the police.

This episode made a great stir in the town. There were but few distractions in Mantua at the end of the XVth century, and such stories were not forgotten until every possible criticism and recrimination had been made. At the moment the State was without its ruler, the Marquis Gonzaga, who was in Lombardy busy assembling the troops of the League against the French. The town was being governed by Isabella d'Este, and no one yet knew how this young woman of twenty-one would lead her people. So couriers were sent to the Marquis to tell him of the affair, together with the pleas of all the parties concerned, including that of Daniele Norsa. With distance as a help, this medley of statements was so exaggerated

that the affair would have seemed like a little revolution if the Marchioness had not been careful Wounded to the quick because, although she was Regent, her existence had been ignored, she cut short all these intrigues by writing to her husband as follows on 30 June 1495

Those who have invented all this wicked gossip evince so much malevolence that they have not scrupled to disturb your peace of mind while you are occupied with the safety of Italy, which they certainly ought not to have done, even if they had no consideration for my honour or for that of my advisers. I beg Your Excellency to let your mind be at ease and give your entire attention to your military enterprise, for I, with the assistance of the excellent lords and magistrates available here, will manage the affairs of State in such a way that you will suffer no injury and that the best that is possible will be done for your subjects. And if anyone, either by letter or in person, mentions disorders which I have not told you about, you can be quite sure that it is a lie, for seeing that I give audience, not only to the officials, but to any of your subjects who wish to speak to me when ever they choose, no trouble can come about without my hearing of it.

The "military enterprise" mentioned above was certainly worth anyone's "entire attention" It was the most important which had been attempted in Italy for two centuries, and a long time was to pass before another such was to be seen On the previous 31st March a League had been formed at Venice between the three most powerful States in Italy—Rome, Venice and Milan—assisted by the King of the Romans (Maximilian) and the King of Spain and soon joined by most of the smaller States—with the object of exterminating the French In diplomatic lan-

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guage this was called “defending Christianity against the Turk”; but in this case the Turk was Charles VIII, then at Naples with the whole of his army and very much embarrassed by his conquest. So unbearable were the French that they had succeeded in reconciling all the States of Italy with one another in order to get rid of them—a thing which had seemed impossible. Each of the Confederate States had undertaken to supply eight thousand horsemen and four thousand foot-soldiers, or their equivalent in money, for the liberation of Italian territory. These figures, naturally, were not reached, but the first troops of the League to be assembled numbered at least twenty-five thousand men, of which four-fifths were actually supplied by Venice.

For these forces, which would be increasing in numbers daily, a leader was required. The Venetian Government chose young Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, a man well versed in skill-at-arms and in the craft of war, beloved by his troops, and the only man, moreover, who was capable of holding in check the terrible irregular cavalry enlisted by the Republic and known as Stradiots. It was a great day in Mantua, therefore, when news came that the Most Serene Republic officially confirmed the appointment of the Marquis Gonzaga as Supreme Leader of the Confederates. It meant glory, alliances, and profit into the bargain, for the emoluments of a “Governor of the Camp” and a “Captain-General,” as he became later, were considerable; there was always

a chance of plunder, moreover, and all this would come back to the little State in the form of donations, sumptuary expenses, pensions and so on. We can imagine, then, with what glad eyes and hearts the Mantuans followed their chief in the *condottiere* war in which he was engaged.

In this kind of war, there were many victories but few battles. Triumphal arches erected with marvellous taste on the return of the combatants, *Te Deums* sung, medals with laurel wreaths and laudatory Latin inscriptions struck—we find all this at every step we take in the history of these times. But for two armies to attack, to come to close quarters and grapple with each other until one of them had left 10 or 20 per cent. of its effectives on the field—that was a barbarous spectacle which seldom spoilt an Italian landscape in the XVth or XVIth centuries. It was, indeed, an extraordinary thing that in a country where people would kill each other so readily in time of peace, they were so chary of doing so in time of war—and mothers, in fact, were only easy in their minds about the fate of their sons when the latter were at the front! Everyone started off with his head full of ferocious thoughts, but it would seem that the open air, the sight of fields and woods, the rôles over the dewy grass in the morning, and nature in full bloom—everything, in fact, that one sees in the middle distance of Paolo Uccello's *Battles* or Benozzo Gozzoli's triumphant marches—softened the hearts of these fierce but sensitive-minded men, as little capable of curbing a sudden

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resentment in their private quarrels as they were of prolonging one amongst the hardships of a campaign and in full sight of danger. . . .

They would challenge each other, skirmish, do a little marauding and play *scartino*, and they would draw their arrears of pay, which was always slow in coming in, from the inhabitants of the district. Sometimes one of these skirmishes would degenerate, no one could quite say why, into a general uproar, resulting in some hours of gesticulation, dust and noise. But when evening came everyone would return to his own lines by torch-light and the leaders of the two opposing sides would meet with mutual congratulations at having extracted themselves from the fray without accident. Nothing more serious than this ever happened unless the troops chanced to scent out some rich booty in the adversary's camp, or unless they found themselves up against foreigners, such as the French or the Swiss, who, for lack of knowledge of the rules of the game, would push straight ahead killing people at random.

This was precisely what the army of the League had to fear in this summer of 1495. As it was assembling round Parma under Gonzaga's orders, news came that the French, having left Naples on 20th May and having resolved to return to France, were approaching through the mountains. They were coming slowly, but they were certainly coming. They had been seen at Lucca on 24th June and at Pontremoli on 29th: they had already crossed the Cisa pass and were coming

down into the plain. The head of their advanced guard, under Marshal de Gyé, was already appearing on the slopes which overlook Fornovo at the head of the Taro valley. It was an extraordinary decision on their part, for although the whole Italian army was in position there to oppose their passage, this was the last road by which anyone had expected them to come. The Italians had established themselves where they were in order to indicate to the French that they were not to come that way and were not to invade Parma or Milan—but certainly with no idea of fighting a battle with them. Charles VIII, so the Italians thought, would select the easiest route for his return march to France, that is to say via Genoa and the coast. But since he elected to rush upon the obstacle, it became necessary to oppose him and to draw swords to do so—which could not but be risky and cause the League a great deal of anxiety.

The French, no doubt, were not in great strength, nine thousand at the outside, and not all of those fit to fight—for they had whittled down their army in the course of their march by leaving garrisons behind in all the fortified places. This total was nothing very much besides the thirty thousand men and more who now composed the army of the League—and there were reinforcements coming in daily. "The Barbarians," moreover, were handicapped by an enormous baggage train and by a whole population of non-combatants—mule-drivers, grooms, sutlers and hangers-on of both sexes—which they were bringing in their

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wake. But they were sturdy troops. Their knights were wont to charge recklessly ; their Swiss were not in the habit of yielding ground ; their Scotch archers, though not numerous, were formidable, and the harp-like twang of their bows when loosed was enough to make anyone tremble ! Finally, their artillery, which was the finest in the world, not even excepting that of the Duke of Ferrara, sowed terror. It was said that after their culverins had been fired, it was quite a common thing to see them reloaded during the same battle and fired again and even several times more before the end of the day—which, in the XVth century, amounted to sorcery. The very fact that the French were in small numbers succeeded in causing the Italians anxiety, for the latter thought that if so great a numerical inferiority did not prevent them from marching straight into danger, then they must have insured themselves against every eventuality by means of some pact with the Devil.

So the Mantuans made vows to all the Saints in Paradise, and especially to the military ones, Saint George and the Archangel Michael, and to the patron saints of their city Saint Andrew and Saint Longinus and sent many relics to the combatants. There was at that time in a monastery in Mantua a nun named Osanna dei Andrasi, a relation and friend of the Gonzaga, a woman of great virtue and wise counsel, something of a sorceress, and reputed to have the ear of the saints. She set herself to pray, night and day,

for the safety of the *condottiere* and her prayers were particularly addressed to the Virgin. Thus we can understand the agitation of the crowd when the Jew Norsa was suspected of having insulted the Madonna. For this was certainly not the moment to start brawling with Heaven!

The French, for their part, had not much more confidence. Up till then their Italian campaign had been little more than a military promenade. They had had ample warning that all the powers in Italy had now risen and united against them, but they scarcely believed it. The thing was so unlikely, in fact, that their own ambassador in Venice, the Lord d'Argenton (Philippe de Comynes) had seen it happen before his eyes without admitting it to be possible, and had flung his hat on the ground in fury when he was told of it. But when the French army came down the last slopes of the Apennines towards Fornovo and suddenly saw the whole plain white with the tents and pavilions of the Confederates, it began to suspect that the return march would not be nearly so easy as the outward one had been. The valley into which they were debouching, the Val di Taro, was very narrow, less than a mile across: their opponents were blocking it completely five miles lower down (except on the left bank of the Taro, which was easily commanded from the right bank) and there was no other access to the plain. To break through this barrier, which now consisted of forty thousand men, they had only nine thousand fit to fight. They arrived

worn out after a march over the mountains in terrific heat, and half dead with hunger, for they had been short of supplies ever since they entered Lunigiana. The Swiss, in particular, were exhausted. As a point of honour they had been reluctant to abandon their heavy artillery, consisting of fourteen big culverins, which no draught animal could pull over the mountains. So they had harnessed themselves to the guns, several hundred men to each, had hauled them up to the summits and lowered them down the far slopes without damaging a single one of them, an exploit which the *Vergier d'honneur* distinguishes as "fearful trouble, marvellous work and excessive weariness, having regard to the method of procedure, the strangeness of the place, and the great and terrible heat which prevailed at the time. . . ."

Honour was saved, but hunger was insistent: moreover, a storm was brewing, and the atmosphere was oppressive. Everyone was very ill at ease. It was useless to think of taking some other route. To go via Tortona would have been more dangerous still, to go back would have been a disgrace, and in the rear, moreover, there was nothing to eat. In front of them they could see the rich expanse of Lombardy, the granary of Europe, where they could replenish their supplies. There was a vague idea of negotiating. If the Italians had been willing to allow the King to pass and to give him, on payment, bread and forage, he would forthwith have regarded his laurels as useless and

superfluous vegetables ! Thus of the two armies confronting each other, one would have been glad not to have to defend itself and the other equally glad not to have to attack.

Once touch was gained, however, the situation changed. The first skirmishes between outposts went in favour of the Italians and gave them courage. Among his light cavalry the Marquis Gonzaga had some half-savage troops resembling Cossacks recruited by Venice in Dalmatia and Albania, and known as *Stradiots*. They were excellent horsemen, daring as foragers, great at cutting off heads, prepared to sleep on the bare ground, requiring very little to eat except for their horses, of which they took great care, and always ready to shout abuse at the enemy. As soon as the Marquis knew that the first French troops had come down to the village of Fornovo at the foot of the mountains, he launched his *Stradiots* against them. The *Stradiots* swallowed them up at a mouthful, so to speak, and came back with French or Swiss heads on the points of their lances. This brought them considerable profit, for these heads were paid for by the Venetian Treasurer like so many head of game, according to a recognized tariff of one ducat or 8 francs 50 centimes per head, which would be equivalent to 45 or 50 francs nowadays [1913], it also brought them great honour, for this was the first success registered against the invader.

We can scarcely realize how exhilarated the army, and Mantua with it, was with this Isabella

d'Este complimented her husband on it, on 2nd July, in these terms :

Now that I have heard of your success over the enemy I must not lose a moment in congratulating you on it and I hope God will grant you further victories I thank you more than I can say for your letter and I beg you to take care of yourself, for I am always uneasy when I think that you are on campaign, although I know that you have always been ambitious to be there I commend myself to Your Highness a thousand and one times From her who loves you and is longing to see Your Highness

ISABELLA—*manu propria.*

And to take better care of him than he was likely to take of himself, she sent him by the next courier an *Agnus Dei*, set in a little gold cross, recommending him to hang it round his neck “with the thought and belief,” she said, “that Your Highness, by the virtue of the Cross and the wood which is contained in it, as well as by the devotion which you bear towards the Blessed Virgin, will be preserved safe and sound. . . .” And she made all the clergy of her capital offer up prayers for her husband.

Meanwhile courier after courier came along the road to Mantua, bringing more and more glorious news. Gonzaga, indeed, had never been apprehensive. On 21st June, writing to Isabella d'Este, he had described his army as “the finest and most powerful which has been seen in Italy for a very long time,” and as “good enough, not only to resist the French, but to exterminate them for ever.”<sup>1</sup> But after the first raids by his *Stradiots* he was wild

<sup>1</sup> “Questo solo exercito non solamente sarà sufficiente a resistare agli franzosi ma ad exterminarli perpetuamente.”

with joy On 2nd July he again wrote to his wife "Illustrissima conjux amantissima The enemy is so frightened, that it is incredible!" He told her, too, that her brother's Alfonso d'Este's troops had arrived that morning, and he adds

For that reason we charge you to keep calm and sleep peacefully, in the strong belief that Our Lord God will grant us a glorious victory in this enterprise, on which depends the public safety of all Italy " and he boldly subscribes his letter as written from the victorious army, as though the latter were already accomplished *Ex castris nictricibus sanctissime et serenissime Lige in valle Taro prope Glarolam*

And the army might, indeed, have been victorious, if it had manœuvred a little The French were coming down the mountain-side in small parties, their advanced guard thirty kilometres head of the King, and the remainder spread out in an interminable column, which jolted along, up hill and down according to the lie of the ground, and was hampered by precipices, worn out and exhausted For three days Marshal de Gyé, who had arrived first at Fornovo, was alone there with no more than one hundred and sixty knights and eight hundred Swiss with which to confront the whole Italian army "in the open" as the saying is But though the French had made this big mistake, the Italians made the even greater one of not attacking them Each side, in fact, was as stupid as it could be, no doubt in order that Heaven and the Saints, whom both of them were

invoking, should have all the honour of the affair. The forty thousand men of the League watched the French forces gradually descending, with no more interest than they watched the Taro flow by, and allowed them to concentrate comfortably at Fornovo, replenish themselves and draw up in battle array according to the elegant usage of the period : advanced guard, "battle troops," rearguard. The Italians might have been the audience at a theatre with nothing to do on the stage and no intention of appearing on it. Moreover, in view of the small number of Charles VIII's soldiers, they now regarded themselves as being certain of success ; and knowing that he had a rich baggage train behind him, their greatest fear was that he would not bring the whole of it into the trap into which he was so stupidly throwing himself. They were much afraid that if they attacked the French army before it was entirely in their hands, they would frighten the baggage train, and that they would see all its wealth slipping away by the mountain paths, where they would not be able to overtake it. They confined themselves, therefore, to making demonstrations with their *Stradiots*, which alarmed the Swiss. The French retorted by firing their falconets, which alarmed the *Stradiots*, And after this mutual exhibition of "frightfulness" they thought that the time had come to parley.

It was Charles VIII who began. On 3rd July the Marquis Gonzaga wrote to Isabella d'Este :—

Last night the King of France sent a herald to me who, in the name of His Majesty, asked for a free passage and supplies,

on payment, as he wished to pass through as a friend (*come amico*) To this request we made no reply as we intended to confer first of all with the Most Illustrious Venetian Government.

Venice was a long way off and here one realizes all the difficulties of the *condottiere*, who was only a military commander in the pay of a political power, when he found himself dealing with a man who was both a general and a political leader. The chances were not even. Charles VIII could both fight and negotiate, whereas Gonzaga could only fight. And in spite of his confidence of success, he did not dare to do so, whatever the circumstances, because neither he nor anyone else knew for certain what Venice wanted—the destruction of the French or an alliance with them, the protection of Milanese territory or a combined invasion of some other part of Italy. If it had rested with him he might possibly have sought out the enemy on the other side of the Apennines, instead of waiting for him on the Taro, and attacked him in the defiles of the Magra, where he would easily have crushed him. But Venice had strictly forbidden him to risk a single man on the other side of the Apennines. Further, the whole district round Parma was strongly French in sympathy, and the camp of the League was already thirteen kilometres from that city. If he moved it further on there would be the danger of the whole of Parma rising in rebellion behind him. Thus political considerations tied his hands as a soldier and made him seem a bad strategist whereas he was really simply an obedient agent.

Disobedience, moreover, was quite impossible. Gonzaga had beside him two proveditors (a proveditor was a kind of Commissary General of the Republic, combining the offices of steward and treasurer), spies who watched his slightest movements very closely and reported them to their Government. Their names were Luca Pisani and Marco Trévisan, and it was to them that the Lord d'Argenton (Philippe de Commynes), who knew them personally, addressed his overtures on behalf of the King of France, thus reaching over Gonzaga's head to pull the strings required to make them take action. But it was very late to start negotiations. Italy had drawn her sword : not to make use of it would have been a disgrace. Venice had not said that the French should be exterminated—but neither had she said that they should be allowed to pass. And this was a unique opportunity of ridding the peninsula of them.

"The enemy," wrote Gonzaga to Isabella d'Este on 3rd July, "is at a place about eight miles from here. He must be in great need of supplies, in our opinion, for the district where he is is very barren, and he has already pillaged it and laid it waste. If he chooses to advance to where we now are, even if he had three times the strength he actually has, he cannot do so without the most obvious risk and probably ruin to himself. To turn back would be both dangerous and shameful ; and as to remaining stationary where he is, we do not think that he will be able to do that for long."

It was "checkmate" for the King.

## THE BATTLE

SO HE HIMSELF might have admitted, in fact, if he had been a king made of carved box-wood or ebony, and if the game of war was in all respects like the noble game of chess. But he had no such idea. On the morning of 6th July, which was a Monday, after a night of thunder and lightning so violent that it seemed, according to an eye-witness, "that earth and sky would be split open," Gonzaga saw the French in movement. They had left their camp at Fornovo, but instead of advancing to storm the entrenchments which he had thrown up at Giarola, they had crossed the Taro torrent by the Bernini ford and were making their way peacefully along the other side of the river. They were moving slowly and majestically, with colours flying, like people in a procession. Their heads and their lances could be seen above the high grass bordering the river.

First came the knights of Marshal de Gyé and of the famous Trivulce, Ludovic the Moor's mortal enemy, a superb troop with long lances, immense plumes and a swarm of squires in attendance, then the Swiss companies, three thousand picked men, flanked by Gascon crossbowmen and the three hundred archers of the Guard, who

had dismounted, to take aim, if necessary, with the utmost accuracy ; then the light artillery—the falconets ; and finally the heavy pieces—the fourteen culverins which had been brought across the Apennines, at once the curse and the glory of the army. This was the advanced guard.

Next, at some distance behind, came the followers of the Comte de Foix, of the great Bastard of Bourbon and of the King's Household, then the King himself with what were known as the “Gentilshommes de vingt écus,” and a certain number of foot soldiers : finally, again at some distance, appeared the knights of the Duke of Orleans, led by Robinet, Lord of Frammeselles, those of M. de Guise and of the Lord of Trémoille, with the Scotch archers bringing up the rear. Parallel to and completely covered by this procession, the long baggage-column, with its drivers and grooms, was also trying to edge its way to the northwards by following the slopes which ran down to the Taro. The whole force was moving in the same direction as the Taro, that is, towards the village of Felegara and, further on, towards that of Medesano, with the object, apparently, of reaching the Plaisance road, as if no one was there to prevent it from doing so. Gonzaga realized that if he delayed any longer the enemy would escape him. It was already almost two o'clock in the afternoon. All the morning he had been amused by Commynes, who had sent herald after herald with fresh offers of peace. But it was now time to act ; and so, in spite of his uncle, Rodolfo

Gonzaga, who put in a plea for the French, and one of the proveditors, who still hesitated to compromise Venice, he determined to attack.

His strategy had been bad, but his tactics were good. Discovering without difficulty that the greater part of the French strength lay with their advanced guard and that this column, which was making its way along a narrow defile between hills where it could not deploy and a torrent which it could not cross, was incapable of wheeling round so that its head could support its tail, he resolved to launch his best troops against the rearguard so as to strike at the enemy's weak spot with his maximum strength, whilst a few hundred cavalry made a simultaneous demonstration attack against the advanced guard. No plan could have been better.

To carry it out, he divided his first line troops into two columns, one of which crossed the Taro well in front of the French advanced guard in order to wait for it and check it, and the other crossed well behind the French rearguard in order to pursue and overthrow it. The first column, which he entrusted to the Count de Caiazzo, the commander of the Duke of Milan's force, the *ducheschi*, consisted of six hundred cavalry and two thousand Swiss. They crossed the river near the Italian camp by the Oppiano ford and took up a position facing the French, leaving behind them on the right bank of the Taro, downstream from Oppiano, the fifth squadron, under the orders of Pian de Melito and Galeazzo Pallavicini, as a reserve to come to their assistance.

in case of need. Gonzaga kept for himself the attack on the rearguard in which he knew that he would find the King. He moved up the Taro, therefore, with his uncle, Rodolfo Gonzaga, at the head of the first squadron, and three other Gonzagas, with Bernardino Fortebracci, at the head of the second squadron of knights, closely followed by his fifteen hundred *Stradiots* and, at some distance, by four thousand foot soldiers. He reached Fornovo, which the French had left that morning, crossed the torrent by the Bernini ford and advanced on the enemy, whose rear he could see a thousand yards off, moving haltingly along and stumbling on the pebbly ground of the foreshore, anxious only to go on its way in peace. On the right bank, upstream from Oppiano, he left a reserve consisting of his fifth squadron under the orders of Antonio de Montefeltro, a bastard son of the great *condottiere*. Montefeltro was to wait, facing the torrent, for Rodolfo Gonzaga, the Marquis's uncle, to give him orders to move.

The French, when they saw Gonzaga coming, separated into two bodies. Their advanced guard continued to advance down the Taro, while their rearguard halted, turned to face the river, and waited. The King himself, warned of what was happening, ceased dubbing certain of his followers knights, which he had been amusing himself by doing for a moment or two, and turning his back on his advanced guard retraced his steps to join the rearguard. Managing to push his way through the crowd of knights, thanks to his captains, who

made a gap for him by shouting “Pass, Sire, pass!” he advanced to the front, even going beyond his own standard-bearer, and prepared to expose himself to danger Charles VIII had been transformed by the occasion No one now recognized in him the puny, timid and irresolute young man of the Court and Council-chamber danger, destiny, duty, and perhaps also the fine proportions of his charger, *Savoy*, had suddenly put him on a pedestal

Nevertheless Gonzaga continued to advance with his troops in close formation, slowly on account of the big stones on the foreshore which, made even more slippery by the continuous rain, rolled from under the horses’ hoofs, and on account of the shrubs which abounded in the old bed of the torrent. When he was a hundred paces from the French, with all his household retainers round him and with his two companies well in hand, trusting in the sturdiness of his mount and the justice of his cause, and feeling at that moment the heart of all Italy beating in time with his own—he gave the order to charge. The two companies broke into a hard gallop, elbows pointed in rear as lances were lowered, and all that weighty, thundering mass came down upon the French like a steel avalanche.

Severe though the shock was, the French line did not give. The few knights who were on the spot, knowing that the King’s safety was at stake and with it the fortunes of France, held steadfastly to their ground The Scotch archers, drawn up near them, fought with that *sang-froid* which had

made them so formidable all over Europe. The two sides became mixed up, and there was a hand-to-hand struggle for a moment or two. The French had not yielded ground, but their ranks had been half opened by the charge of the Marquis's troops, and, on their right, on the side on which the hill was, that is, the *Straidiots* had entirely outflanked them. Shouts were raised from behind Charles VIII's camp, where his baggage was on its way and where his tents had already been provisionally pitched. These shouts, heard above the clash of steel, the shrill notes of the trumpets and the reverberations of the thunder, announced the fact that the French flank had been turned.

At that moment the Marquis really thought that the battle was won. A few paces away he saw the King of France, separated from the Italians only by a thin line of combatants, not well guarded and easily recognizable by his immense white and violet plumes, his violet and white surcoat decorated with "Jerusalem rosettes" flying loose above his armour and by his black horse, which was curveting in every direction. All the Mantuan nobles pressed towards this magnificent prize, which they looked upon as already theirs. Lances were already being pointed at him to dismount him when Mathieu de Bourbon, "the great Bastard," whom the King had but the very moment before appointed to be his "brother-in-arms," flung himself in front of him and received the thrusts. He was thrown from his horse in the midst of the Italians, but he sprang up and, turning

about, collected a swarm of enemies round him In the end he was overcome, taken prisoner and led off to the Italian camp But by this diversion he had saved his master

At the same time the King's household troops, placed on his left, took the Mantuan cavalry in enfilade, penetrated it like a wedge, broke through it and, cutting it to pieces, threw it back on the Taro Gonzaga, thus hard hit on his right flank and forced back with his troops in disorder, made superhuman efforts to maintain his line of battle Three times was his horse felled beneath him, and three times, thanks to the devotion of his squires, did he mount a fresh one and charge.

"Not since Hector of Troy," wrote an eyewitness to Isabella d'Este, "has any one man done more than he did I believe he killed ten men single-handed, and I think that you must have prayed hard for him to come out of it alive."

Everywhere his square, white banner was to be seen fluttering above the waving plumes and beneath the forest of lances The struggle lasted for a quarter of an hour But very gradually his companies were thinned, his nobles were dismounted and the flower of his advanced guard was falling one by one. He had to think of withdrawing on his reserves and of bringing up fresh troops

He looked round him Where were his *Stradiots*? They, at the first encounter, had outflanked the French along the hill and by so doing would have made victory certain, when, to their great joy

but unfortunately for the Confederates, they had caught sight of the baggage train bearing the King's treasures. They had killed eighty to a hundred or so of those drivers or servants who put up a resistance, had looted the baggage conscientiously enough, and were now withdrawing by by-paths, concluding that the battle was over since they had captured the booty. . . . Where were the four thousand foot soldiers who were following behind? They were still on the other side of the torrent, either because they could not get across—it was growing wider every minute—or because they were none too anxious to do so. . . . What was Montefeltro doing with his reserve? Montefeltro was stamping about on the foreshore, on the other side of the Taro, waiting for the orders which ought to have been sent him by Rodolfo Gonzaga, but which Rodolfo Gonzaga had not sent him for the very good reason that he was dead, having been one of the first to fall in the charge against the French.

Thus, although the greater part of this force was still intact, Gonzaga, with no one coming to his assistance, saw himself forced to withdraw. His own troops were flying in every direction, some returning to Fornovo whence they came, others going the shortest way back to their camp, crossing the Taro by all the fords and even taking their chances where there were none. In hot pursuit of them were the French nobles, who had left their King all alone in order to give chase to the fugitives. The ground was strewn with lances

thrown away by those who wanted to fly the faster. On every side valets could be seen hurrying up to dismounted knights and busily engaged in overpowering them by breaking the vizors of their helmets with little hatchets. Thus a quarter of an hour had been enough to turn the tables completely, and in the universal rout which he realized had begun Gonzaga, with no further hope in human succour, turned to the Madonna and vowed to erect a beautiful monument to her if he came out of the battle safe and sound.

He did come out of it, but in a *débâcle* even greater than he had expected. For things had gone no better at the other end of the field than at his own Caiazzo, with orders to break through, or at any rate hold, the French advanced guard had not been able to induce his men to attack the enemy. When his squadron found itself facing the fierce Swiss companies of Engelbert de Clèves and Marshal de Gye's knights, it had broken away from him as soon as it crossed lances with the foe, as though under the force of compressed air. His reserve, massed on the other bank and held in leash by the Venetian provveditors, who did not want to risk everything at one blow, had not stirred. All this mob was now hurrying back to the camp at Giarola, and thousands were to be seen in flight on the Parma and Fornovo roads. Some of them went as far as Reggio, and the fugitives were spread out like a fan on every road and in every direction. Their fears were baseless. No one was in pursuit of them—not a Frenchman.

dared cross the Taro, and Marshal Gyé's corps remained immobile, like an army of statues, on the other bank. But those panics which are the least justifiable are the most difficult to check. And when Gonzaga got back to camp he found that the tents were already being packed up on the mules and that even the reserves were about to retreat.

"At that moment," he wrote later on, "we foresaw the ruin of the whole of Italy: and we tremble still when we think of it."

Fortunately someone who knew the French and realized their anxiety arrived at the right moment to reassure the Confederates. This was an Orsini, Count Pitigliano, whom Charles VIII had captured at Nola and who was with him as a prisoner on parole. He had just broken away from his captors to rejoin his compatriots at full gallop, shouting out his own name, "Pitigliano! Pitigliano!" so that he should be recognized, and he now implored them not to regard themselves as defeated but to put up a fight. Thanks to him Gonzaga was able to restore the *moral* of his forces and check their retreat. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the Italians who were serving in Charles VIII's army—Trivulce, Secco the Florentine and Camillo Vitelli—guessing that the Confederates were in a panic too, were begging the King to cross the Taro and turn his success into a complete victory. Thus each side was being urged to action by those who knew the other side best. But if it be true that in war the bravest man is he who is

least afraid, then no one was the bravest that evening. Neither side could make up its mind to do anything. The King slept in a farm between Felegara and Medesano. Gonzaga passed the whole night almost opposite him, at Giarola. His army was very much reduced—he had lost about three thousand men, of whom three hundred were knights, and among these latter were sixty Mantuan nobles, including his own uncle, Rodolfo Gonzaga, "the Pillar of the Army," Giovanni Maria Gonzaga and Guidone Gonzaga. It was the most bloody battle which had been seen in Italy for two hundred years. And the runaways were more numerous still. He remained up all night, however, reorganizing his effectives, maintaining his positions and displaying the coolness and tenacity of a real leader. On the other side of the Taro lights were burning and drums were beating. The French were on the watch and had not disarmed.

The next day was taken up with conferences. There was great relief in the Italian camp when a herald was seen crossing the ford and when he announced that he brought a safe-conduct from the King to the Confederate leaders if they wished to reopen negotiations in an interview. Presently there appeared, above the high grass on the other side of the torrent, the heads of a little group of French lords from which, at last, after much coming and going on the part of the herald, the Lord d'Argenton, Philippe de Commynes, detached himself. Gonzaga, Caiazzo and the two prove-

ditors received him on the foreshore at some distance from the torrent, whose steadily mounting roar prevented what was said being heard, and innumerable politenesses were exchanged. There was much mutual congratulation on the courage displayed and leniency towards the prisoners was urged—an unnecessary attention, seeing that the Italians had only taken one of any consequence—the Bastard of Bourbon—and the French none at all, as they had killed every single one who had fallen into their hands ! The Marquis was very anxious to know whether the King would have had him killed if he had been taken prisoner in the battle.

“ I told him ‘ No,’ ” says Commynes in his account of the battle, “ but that he would have been well treated.”

Similar interviews continued until nightfall, and it was agreed to continue them next day, beginning in the morning. On the following day, which was Wednesday, 8th July, the Italians waited in vain for the shrewdest talker and chronicler of the age. He did not appear. At last, towards noon, seeing and hearing nothing from the direction of Medesano, some of them took the risk and went out to look round. But though they went a long way they found nothing. The French had decamped. . . .

Were the Italians victorious then ? The enemy, very luckily for them, was in flight, but in the direction of his avowed objective, and after having inflicted heavy losses on those who had attempted

to bar his way. The Marquis was none too sure how he ought to christen the action. He wrote to Isabella d'Este

Yesterday a battle, as you will have heard from the messenger, was very hotly contested and we have lost many of our men, among others Lord Rodolfo and Measure Giovanni Maria, together with a large number of our own company. But it is certain that many more of the enemy were killed. What we ourselves did personally is known to all so that I need not speak of it here and I will only tell you that we found ourselves in such a situation that only God, one might say, could have got us out of it. The chief cause of the confusion was the disobedience of the *Stradiots*, who thought of nothing else but pillaging and of whom not a single one appeared when we most had need of them. Thanks to God, we and the army were saved, but many fled, though there was no one whatever in pursuit of them, and amongst these was the greater part of the foot soldiers of whom very few are now left. All this has caused me the greatest grief I have ever known, and if by any ill-chance, our enemies had returned to the attack against us we would have been utterly destroyed. A few French nobles were taken prisoner by our troops, amongst others the Count de Pighano and M<sup>e</sup> the Bastard of Bourbon. The enemy moved off this morning and gained the hills in the direction of Borgo San Donnino and Plaisance. We are going to watch their march and see what we can do next. If everyone had fought as we did, the victory would have been more complete and not a Frenchman would have escaped.

This is not the letter of either a victor or a fool. When he wrote it the Marquis Gonzaga was very doubtful of having won a great victory. He learnt of it only from the letters, congratulations and enthusiastic praise which he received from Venice, Mantua, Rome and the whole of Italy and by the honours which were bestowed upon him. With such powerful rulers as the Doge assuring him that he had delivered Italy and giving

him, with the title of Captain-General of the Armies of the Republic, a grant of 2,000 ducats a year and a pension of 1,000 ducats for Isabella d'Este, with the best poets of the day competing to sing his praises and comparing him with Hannibal and Scipio, he ended by ranging himself on the side of public opinion. It was then that he ordered Sperandio to strike the famous medal which shows him in left profile, wearing a little cap and a cuirass ; and on the reverse, on horseback as he was at Fornovo, in the midst of his knights and turning towards his squire, with the inscription :

OB RESTITUTAM ITALIÆ LIBERTATEM.

From Talpa he ordered the medal whereon is shown Curtius hurling himself into the abyss, with the inscription :

UNIVERSÆ ITALIÆ LIBERATORI.

He now acknowledged himself as a conqueror.

But was he so, in fact ? Everything depends upon how one defines the word "victory." From the tactical point of view an army is victorious if it achieves the purpose which it sets out to achieve. Now the purpose of the French in this case was to pass through into Lombardy—and they did pass. The tactical victory was theirs, therefore, and history is justified in so deciding. But there are points of view other than the tactical one, and of these I, for my part, can perceive three, according to which one could give the victory to Italy. First of all, it must not be for-

gotten that in the XVth century the mercenary bands of which the armies were composed regarded pillage as the supreme object of war. The real victory was a victory in which one could pillage. Now at Fornovo, it was the French and not the Italian camp which was pillaged. The *Stradiots* captured the King's treasures, and when they were eventually forced to disgorge them in the Marquis's tent marvellous booty was disclosed—two standards, several pavilions with their tapestries, Charles VIII's morion and State sword, his prayer-book, with a prayer in it in French which was said to have been Charlemagne's, the royal seals in solid gold, and the King's most precious relics—his portable altar, a piece of the true Cross, a thorn from Jesus' crown, a piece of the Blessed Virgin's cloak, a bone of St. Denis, which he much revered and which was always on the altar when Mass was said—and finally with all these sacred things, one very profane one which he held in equal esteem—a notebook containing portraits of the courtesans who had pleased him in various Italian towns *retracti de damiselle del re*. This notebook, four tapestries and the stump of a broken lance, were the Marquis's share in all this booty. They were spoils which were at once artistic and royal, bringing honour to his taste and to his sword. From the popular point of view, therefore, the Italians were certainly the victors.

Then there is the "chivalrous" or "jousting" point of view. To the knights, war was not so much a matter of operations and manoeuvres as a

tournament, complicated, indeed, by captures and ransoms. Now in a tournament the man who went away, quitting the lists after an encounter and showing no inclination to expose himself to another, was regarded as having been defeated. This was the case with the French. On the day of the battle they had proved themselves excellent fighters, but the next day had been less brilliant and the day after had not been brilliant at all.

"And then we turned our backs on the enemy and took the road of safety, which is indeed a fearful thing for an army to do," Commynes admitted.

They had struck their camp surreptitiously in the night after having heard Mass: and their hasty withdrawal "by hilly roads and woods,"<sup>1</sup> though it might not have been a rout was certainly more like a retreat than an advance. They left in the hands of the Confederates not only their relics and their treasures, worth 200,000 ducats, it was said, but also one of their most distinguished knights, the Bastard of Bourbon. The latter, in his anxiety to be released, offered a ransom of 10,000 *scudi*, 4,000 of which he carried with him hidden in his saddle. The French, in short, had abandoned their position. The Italians, therefore, were justified in regarding themselves as having won a definite victory.

Finally, in default of any other, they had won one over themselves. For one instant they had forgotten their own quarrels: they were united. It had been but an instant, and even while it had

<sup>1</sup> "Par chemyn bossu et boys."

lasted the union had not been perfect. The recriminations which followed—from the Milanese against the Venetians, from the Venetians against the Duke of Milan, and many others as well—proved that only too clearly. Nevertheless, on that 6 July 1495, amongst the thousands of Italians assembled in arms against the invader, there were, doubtless, enough enthusiastic, ingenuous men of good will to provide, as a sketch in clumsy outline like a child's attempt at drawing, against the dark background of the XVth century, a vague likeness of what their united country was one day to become. During that one instant, three and a half centuries in advance of her official birth, Italy existed on the records of the European social state.

### III

#### THE VOTIVE OFFERING

GONZAGA ISSUED FROM FORNOVO, then, with all the honours of war. He now had to pay his debts. On these one was to the Madonna, whose protecting hand had very evidently been held over him in the *mélée*. Though he did not lead a very edifying life, he was devout: he had no intention, therefore, of repudiating his debt to the kindly Virgin, but he was already considering how he could clear it without its costing him anything. Then he remembered Daniele Norsa, whose house had been attacked during the festival of Ascension because he had been thought guilty of impiety to the Madonna. It occurred to the Marquis that it would be pleasing to Heaven if he could so arrange matters that the fulfilment of his vow should be combined with the punishment of the miscreant. Having consulted his wife and his brother Sigismondo, the protonotary, on the subject, he decided that the monument should take the form of a large altar-piece to the glory of the Blessed Virgin, and that it should be painted by Mantegna and paid for by the Jew. In it there should appear the triumphant Madonna with the Marquis at her feet in battle armour, and all his family gathered round him. The price was fixed

at 110 ducats, a little less than 1,000 francs in those days, but equal to between five and six thousand to-day (1913). This sum the Jew was to hand over forthwith, not, however, to the painter, who might have put it to bad uses, but to the protonotary, who undertook to supervise the work.

Everyone taxed his wits to make the fête more splendid, and a brother of the *Eremitani* maintained that a votive offering of this kind should have a frame worthy of it, and suggested that a new church, or at least a chapel, which would be "the Chapel of Victory," ought to be built to house the new picture. And what better site could there be on which to build it than on that of the house of the banker Norsa, the very man who had committed the sacrilege? Gonzaga thought this a very ingenious idea. It satisfied many of his aspirations. At one stroke he would pay his debt to the Blessed Virgin without any expense to himself, he would give pleasure to his old painter, and he would enrich his capital with a monument erected to the glory of Italy and the Church and to the confusion of the French and the Jews.

Mantegna, although he was no longer young, set to work enthusiastically. So did Bernardo Ghisolfo, the architect, with the result that before a year had passed everything was ready for the commemoration of the victory. On 6 July 1496, the anniversary of the battle of the Taro, a procession which was at once aesthetic and pious was to be seen winding its way through Mantua, recalling the ovation which Florence had formerly

given to Cimabue's Madonna. In the street where Mantegna lived, facing the San Sebastiano Palace, a platform had been set up, on which was displayed to the gaping admiration of the crowd the picture which we now have in the Louvre, then freshly painted and showing all the brilliancy of its vivid colouring. Perched all round this stage children dressed as angels with wings on their backs or as apostles were singing hymns.

Then, when all the notabilities and clergy were assembled, the masterpiece was placed on a chariot and the procession started for the new church. It was a long way from Mantegna's house, which was in the extreme south of the city, to the Via San Simone (now the Via Domenico Fernelli) where the Chapel of Victory had just been built, right at the north end of Mantua. The whole city had to be crossed. Everyone was present at the festival, except the hero himself, the Marquis Gonzaga, who was at that time busy again making war in the kingdom of Naples. But the Marchioness did not fail to give him an account of it.

The figure of Our Lady [she wrote to him] which Andrea Mantegna has painted, was carried in procession from his house, last Friday, which was the 6th of this month, to the new chapel of *Santa Maria della Vittoria*, in commemoration of last year's battle and of your own dazzling exploits, in the midst of a bigger crowd than I have ever seen in any procession in this city. My Confessor, Fra Pietro, gave us a fine discourse at High Mass and pronounced words suitable to the occasion, entreating the glorious Virgin Mary to protect Your Excellency from all ill and bring you back victorious to your home. In my present state of health [her second daughter was soon to be born] I was unable to follow the procession on foot, but I went to the Borgo

to see it pass and I returned to the Castello by way of the new chapel, which is very ornate. The streets were filled with people.

What the Marchioness did not say was that the inhabitants were already honouring this Madonna as a guardian divinity, and were burning candles and torches round her. They regarded this knight in armour as a victor, and his victory as a miracle. And in that they were only half wrong—for the picture is a miracle of art.

Take a look at it. Nothing of the contingencies, the meannesses or the baseness of all that story has found its way in. One might say that the painter, shut away in his studio in San Sebastiano, knew nothing of that, or that, by some divine method, he transformed all the ugliness into its equivalent in beauty, as naturally and with as little effort as the silk-worm spins its thread out of the thick leaves of the mulberry-tree. It is the radiant vision of a perfected humanity, of an endless equilibrium, henceforth freed from all anxiety and all strife. Beneath a bower of leaves and fruits at which birds are pecking, the Virgin sits enthroned, as though under the central pavilion of a horticultural exhibition—at her feet in a marble bas-relief can be seen the poor little tree round which the serpent, the Tempter, is coiled—the poor tree of knowledge of good and evil above her head, in Paradise regained, Nature has made a rainbow of all those fruits which are not forbidden. The two ends of her cloak are held up, right and left, by two giants, Saint Michael

and Saint George, both equally young, equally well supplied with hair and clad alike in pseudo-Roman armour, with a disdain for archæological exactitude very natural in archangels. Both of them are looking down at a knight, kneeling in ecstasy, with his hands clasped, who is raising his face, with its flat nose and thick lips, towards the Virgin in such a way as to disclose the whites of his negro eyes. And the Infant Jesus, upright on his mother's lap, is blessing him.

The knight is Francesco Gonzaga. He is seen in his steel armour, half covered by a rich coat-of-arms and a skirt with heavy embroidered folds. These, however, hide nothing that is essential in his martial attire : the pallette sticking up on the right shoulder, the lance-rest projecting from the right breast, the articulated forearm pieces with bilobated orillons encasing the elbow, the thigh-pieces, the orillons of the steel knee-pieces, the end of the coat of mail visible below the armour, the greaves, the heels with their spurs shining like gold stars in the shadow—all these can be seen. We feel that this lissome, powerful figure, now in repose, will be released like a steel spring as soon as the prayer is finished, and will strike hard. The ecstatic smile, disclosing teeth like a wolf's, suggests a naive, violent spirit, reaching out from itself towards the infinite at this particular moment, but likely to fall back, as soon as the physical body rises again, into the power of brutal passions and of the gods of the Nether World.

Facing him, also on her knees but in a lower

and more humble posture than his, is the nun who prayed for him during the battle, that Osanna dei Andrasì who was the good genius of the Gonzaga and who was destined to be beatified ten years later by Leo X. She is wearing the costume commonly assigned by the painters of the period to the old women of the Bible—a white veil hiding the hair and covering the neck and yellow material rolled round the head like a turban indicate Saint Elizabeth, Isabella d'Este's patron saint. Her half-opened lips are continuing the prayer that she has begun, whilst her fingers are telling her beads. Above her is the infant Saint John the Baptist, patron saint of Gian Francesco Gonzaga. And behind all these people, at the back of the soldier-saints, the two bearded old men, of whom one sees nothing but the heads, are the two patron saints of Mantua. Saint Andrew is holding a thin stick with a cross at its upper end, and Saint Longinus is holding a lance—the lance with which he pierced Christ's side and which resembles those "bordonasses," painted red, which were picked up in bundles on the battlefield of Fornovo. Saint Andrew is peeping over the Virgin's cloak and trying to see something of what is going on, but Saint Longinus is obviously uninterested and is looking out of the picture. Since he is of a pronounced Semitic type, I suspect this of being a portrait of Daniele Norsa, who is thinking of his 110 ducats. In the midst of this fête he has the modest, self-effacing air of the man who has paid for it!

To do honour to the Madonna there has been grouped round her in this narrow space all the most beautiful things known to the latter part of the XVth century. The depths of the sea have been plumbed for a branch of red coral, which hangs suspended above her head. The bowels of the earth have been searched for pale marble and sarrancolin to serve as her pedestal. And the heights of the sky have been sought for the singing birds and the warrior archangels. All the natural kingdoms and that of art, too, have made their contributions. From Venice has been brought an immense chaplet of those large, false pearls called *jocalia de cristallo* to hang in the arch of leaves. Even tombs have been rifled : the footstool on which the Virgin's feet are resting is borrowed from the tomb of Marsuppini by Desiderio da Settignano, which is in the Santa Croce Church in Florence. The remotest islands, recently discovered by Christopher Columbus, have provided a macaw and a cockatoo to perch in the foliage. Isabella d'Este's gardener, the cleverest man in Italy at clipping box-trees, was doubtless brought from Porto to arrange the arch of vegetation, as he had arranged those in the *Virtue Driving away the Vices*, which is on one side of the *Madonna*, and possibly, too, the rocky arcade in the *Parnassus*, which is on the other. He has loaded it with enormous specimens of intensive horticulture, and even the children who ran along the streets of Mantua following the procession of the Madonna must have understood the de-

lights of this juicy, pulpy, savoury, gastronomic Paradise!

We touch here on one of the best-defined characteristics of the Primitives, and one which gives them their greatest charm. Mantegna was no longer a Primitive, but he was still a Pre-Raphaelite or a "Pre-Renaissant." He already possessed a consummate knowledge of design, as his perspective clearly shows—but like the Primitives he preserved his taste for uniting, for no other reason than the delight of the eye, all the different kinds of beauty and all the picturesque objects which he could reproduce. And, like the Primitives again, he was able to reproduce many. It was later than this that painters came to devote themselves, one to the nude, another to landscape, another to drapery or still life—in a word to "specialize." At the moment when Mantegna was painting, all the various *genres* were combined in the one artist—himself.

There is, in this picture, the work of an anatomist—the figure of Gonzaga, the right hand of the Virgin, the two children, the *Beata Osanna* are triumphs of perspective. There is the work of a decorative artist—the leafy arch, the throne, the angels' armour are sufficient evidence of that. And there is the work of a painter of still life, of a man capable of showing the veining of marble, and the swell of ripened fruit, of making the reflection from a cuirass shine in the darkness, of lighting up globes of crystal, of blending the colours of fabrics and contrasting them and showing

their rumpled folds, of making the high lights fall on them and shine back from them. There is the work of a tailor, expert at devising the unknown fashions of angels : look at his Saint Michael, whom he has clad with a cuirass above and a dress below, in the manner of the strange compromise invented in our day for those German princesses who are honorary colonels of some regiment or other. There is the work of a man who understands lighting and is observant of its least reflections : observe the underlying light, gilded and reflected by the marble all along the bottle-green solleret and on the articulated iron footgear. And there is the work of a colourist who knows how to break up his tones cleverly : observe how the scarf which is fluttering round the sword changes tone and becomes redder as it descends into the shadow.

The colourist, moreover, can be seen throughout. This painting, which one first sees as a piece of chased work with sharp, bright edges and the hard brilliance of metal, is none the less an exquisite harmony : and this harmony, composed of shades of pomegranate and bottle-green, of sombre, heavy golds, of vivid touches of red and of neutral tints, pinkish or tending towards violet, but scarcely ever becoming white or yellow, displays from end to end the sumptuousness of a stained-glass window.

There is, finally, the work of a profound and subtle physiognomist. When we approach this picture we see, before everything else, this—a knight protected by a Madonna—and to whatever

point our attention may be drawn next it is irresistibly brought back towards this—the protective hand of the Virgin. Everything leads in that direction, all the lines ascend towards it or fall away from it. Now one follows the eyes in a picture as one follows the eyes of a crowd in the street—some invincible, magnetic tendency makes us look, in spite of ourselves, at whatever they are looking at.

The genius of the artist lies in his having utilized this physiological law to exalt a moral sentiment, by making the magnetic point of the picture at the same time the main point of the whole story, the whole drama, the whole commemoration. He may have done this quite unconsciously, perhaps, but a law which is unconsciously observed does not produce its effect any the less on that account, and in this case the effect is precise, commanding and decisive. If the picture was there on that altar, the triumphal arch was erected, the people worshipped, and the patron saints of Mantua appeared, it was because, and only because, that particular hand had been outstretched over that particular head in time of danger.

And the half-savage head itself—what profound and subtle art was required to make of it what appears here! True, it can be recognized, for the painter would not have dared not to portray a likeness when a whole people, who knew the model, was there to pass judgment upon it. And we know that the people were enchanted by it everyone filing past the picture extolled the accuracy

of the painter of the portrait. But he had known how to get the exact angle by which the defects of this mask would best be minimized, and he also knew the expression which would transfigure it into a radiant countenance. The thousand different and contradictory beings which are in each of us do not all appear at the same time : there are some which may only appear once in all our life ; and of such, perhaps, was the mystic in Gonzaga. For one instant the intoxication of knowing that peril was averted and of returning safe to a family which had been through torment, had been able to invoke in his features the adoring soul which we can see in the picture. . . . It was, very probably, only for a minute, but the painter was justified in seizing his chance. Perhaps he had been waiting for it for a long time. Mantegna was sixty-five when he painted this picture, so for thirty-two years he had been observing the Gonzaga, grandfather, father, son and grandson, in profile, full face, three-quarter face, seated, standing, with their wives, their dogs, their horses and their dwarfs. The experiment was a less dangerous one for him than it would have been for anyone else. Nevertheless, would he have been so triumphantly successful without a profound knowledge of physiognomy ?

And all this knowledge, which is as great as that of the Primitives, is, as theirs was, deeply imbued with fantasy. It is the eye and the hand of Meissonier, but it is the soul of Shakespeare. And the two aspects of this art are in juxtaposition, crudely,

without transition, precaution or excuse—once again as with the Primitives. Thus Gonzaga's armour, which is very accurately reproduced, is placed next to the extraordinary half-Roman, half-archangelical costume of Saint Michael. The accurate proportions of the human figures are contrasted with the gigantic proportions of the two warrior-saints and the unnaturally small hands of the archangel. The gestures are perfectly simple and logical, proportionate and effective—infinitely more so than they are destined to be in the work of Mantegna's successors. There is here no pompous or ostentatious pose. But they are displayed against a background which is quite unreal, beneath an artificial pomological collection, in sight of exotic birds, which are hardly ever seen at large. Again, the Virgin's sleeve is subjected to the common law of gravity, and would fall with her hand if she lowered it, whilst, beside her, Saint Michael's scarf is not so subjected and flutters round his sword with no regard for reality. If boredom, in Art as elsewhere, "is born of uniformity," then it is because of that, no doubt, that the Primitives, who are often absurd and always imperfect, are never boring—they are never the same in any two things.

Thus of all the masterpieces by Mantegna the *Madonna of Victory* is the one which one can look at continually, without weariness and without starting all over again, as one can look at *la Gioconda* and as one can look at most of Leonardo da Vinci's works. The gestures are concordant, the

details fit in, the colours harmonize as if they are to last until eternity. The peace which reigns there insinuates itself into one's soul, the rhythm which upholds it directs one's thoughts. It is a place in which one would be glad to live.

One thing only is missing : the framework of stones, the monument from which the French troops snatched the picture during the occupation of Mantua in 1797, its national and historical pedestal, its motherland, in fact. Down there in the south, on the plains of Lombardy, at one side of a deserted Mantuan street, the *Chapel*, deprived of its *Victory*, its *Madonna*, its knight, and its purpose, cut in two half-way up by a new ceiling, its main doorway half filled in and converted into a bay window, is now only a workshop and a store for marbles. On the threshold an old sculptor sits smoking a pipe. It is still quite distinct from the other houses, forming a little island on its own in the Via Domenico Fornelli, between the church of Saint Simon and Saint Jude and the rest of the street. The place which was filled, a hundred and sixteen years ago, by Mantegna's masterpiece is still to be seen, encumbered though it is with funereal monuments. The framework still clings to its place and displays the gaping hole from which its picture was snatched.

It might be put back there. It would re-live there, the hidden, edifying, consolatory life of an altar-piece. It would receive fewer visits there than at the Louvre, fewer passers-by, but more pilgrims. Sometimes even, perhaps, some old

woman, knowing not who Mantegna was, or what was Fornovo, would perceive in this picture something which the critics and the historians, in their learned controversies, have omitted to see in it—a Madonna, a divine protectress—and, without realizing what she was doing, would reproduce to the life one of the figures who surround that Madonna by kneeling down before her and saying an *Ave Maria*.

Such is the history of this *Madonna*, painted in commemoration of a victory which was not won, in expiation of a sacrilege which was not committed, and paid for by someone who did not believe in her. But of what importance is the *birth* of a masterpiece? Only its life and the life it suggests to us is of importance. From an injustice done to a poor Jew and from the boasting of a defeated general there has sprung a vision so beautiful that it will for ever incline thoughtful souls to practise justice and love humility.

PLATE XVI



PORTRAIT OF BALDASSARE CASTIGLIO<sup>N</sup>E  
By Raphael, in the Salon Carré, Louvre

To face p 297

*BALDASSARE CASTIGLIONE  
IN THE LOUVRE*

Other portraits of Baldassare Castiglione —

Authentic 1st Oil painting after a portrait made by Raphael, in 1519 Bust, bare-headed, three-quarter face, the chest crossed by an inscription beginning *Baldasar de Castilione* and ending *ANNO MDXXI*  
(In the Corsini Palace in Rome)

2nd Oil painting, full face, dressed in black with a hat and gloves, and with a curtain and a landscape in the background. Attributed to Parmigiano and supposed to have been painted in 1524. (In Lord Lansdowne's collection at Bowood)

3rd Medal Right profile Head bare and neck uncovered, clad in the antique style, with the inscription · BALTHAZAR CASTILION, Gr. F. On the reverse, Apollo in his chariot, with two galloping horses driven by winged satellites, is passing behind a globe of the world on which one can see Italy indicated, with the inscription TENEBRARUM ET Lucis.

Presumed portraits, bearing resemblance —

1st The head of a man, turned towards Raphael, three-quarter face, bearded, wearing a head-band and holding a terrestrial globe which shows Zoroaster, on the extreme right of the *School of Athens*, painted by Raphael in 1510 (In the Vatican)

2nd The Roman warrior, standing, bare-headed and armed with a lance, in the foreground of the picture *The Court of Isabella d'Este or The Triumph of Poetry*. (In the Louvre)

## *BALDASSARE CASTIGLIONE IN THE LOUVRE*

I

### *A PORTRAIT*

SOME FOUR HUNDRED YEARS AGO, during the winter of 1519, the Italian humanists were passing round, from hand to hand, a kind of poem in Latin, which one of them had just composed and which was in the form of a letter from a wife to her husband. The couple had not been married long, and the wife was alone with her newly-born son in their home at Mantua, while the husband was in Rome as ambassador to the Pope, busy with a thousand and one affairs which had no interest for her. She was complaining of his absence and languishing for his return. She had only his portrait, painted by Raphael, to take the place of her absent husband.

*Sola tuos vultus referens Raphaelis imago  
Picta manu curas allevat usque meas.*

And she would smile at the portrait and talk to it as though it were alive. In fact she talked to it so much and so well that it seemed to her to smile back and answer her. She would bring the child to it and he would recognize it and greet it.

*Agnoscit, balboque patrem puer ore salutat  
Hoc solor longos decipioque dies.*

This epistle was greatly admired. Everyone knew that its author was Baldassare Castiglione, and that he was writing of himself, his wife and his two-year-old child. People much appreciated the prudence of this husband, already of mature age, who was at pains to copy out the lamentations to which his absence inspired his young wife. There was something in that, it was felt, which savoured of the fine perfume of Latinity. Nor was the allusion to the portrait by Raphael missed. It had been painted only four years previously and was already famous. It is so still. It is the one which for the last two years has taken the place of *La Gioconda*.<sup>1</sup>

I do not know why it was chosen, but a better selection could not have been made. At a first glance one experienced a certain uncasiness at

<sup>1</sup> Written in 1913. *La Gioconda* has since been recovered, of course.  
—Translator's Note

Before reaching this place of honour in the middle of the *Salon Carré* it [the portrait by Raphael] had done much travelling. Painted in Rome during the autumn of 1515, it went with Castiglione to Spain in 1524. Castiglione died at Toledo in 1529, and it then came back to Mantua where it remained with his family until the beginning of the XVIIth century. Then it was lost sight of for a certain number of years, and no historian can prove where it was during that time. It was re-discovered in 1630, in the studio of the painter Van Asselin at Amsterdam, and no one could say how it got there. But it was certainly the picture in question, and no other. It was admired and copied by Rembrandt and by Rubens. In 1639 it was sold at auction and passed into the collection of a Spanish nobleman named Don Alfonso de Lopez, who paid 3,500 florins for it, or about 20,500 francs in our money [1913]. Soon afterwards this nobleman fell into disgrace, and had to sell all his belongings. The portrait was then bought by Cardinal Mazarin, and on the death of the cardinal in 1661 Louis XIV took it for 3,000 *livres*, or about 9,750 francs. And now it is in the Louvre, where it must be hoped that its history is ended.

seeing, in the middle of the *Salon Carré*, in place of the usual smile—the most feminine of all smiles—this heavily-bearded man, with a tight-fitting skull cap and over it a large black hat or upturned bonnet, whose big blue eyes looked so calmly at one. One was well aware that one would no longer see *La Gioconda* there, but one felt that the place where she had been for so long was sacred, somehow, and that a man ought not to be esconced there at his ease. Perhaps the curators of the Louvre would have done better to leave the place vacant—as Burne Jones, in his famous mosaic of *Christ Surrounded by Angels*, which is in the American church, St. Paul's, in Rome, left a space for the greatest of them, on the right hand of God, until the day when he should return. But since someone was to be placed there, Baldassare Castiglione was certainly the right choice. In his expression and his vague smile there is something which attracts one, as in the other picture, but which also reassures one. He was the "accomplished man" of the Renaissance, as *La Gioconda* was its "dream woman." Here we have history in the place of legend.

When one's first emotion is over, however, one is very taken with these frank features. The eyes are those of a faithful dog, the mouth is closed and yet is eloquent of much, the bearing is quiet, modest and reserved. There is complete honesty, both in the face and also in the painting of it. There is nothing here simply for effect—there is no posing, no display, no noticeably daring

brush-work. Nearly all of it is in one colour, or rather in two or three shades of the same quiet colour and the changes from tone to tone are imperceptible. On this occasion Raphael's palette was like the vocabulary of the people of the XVIIth century, a restrained one, but one in which, with each word in its exact place, the most delicate shades of thought could be expressed. Only what is alive is reddish or coloured—the flesh, the beard, the eyes. The fire of a jewel just smoulders feebly in two places—in the coal-black hat and in the cinders of the fur. Seen in the Louvre, in company with works by Giorgione, Titian and Paul Veronese, this is the winter of colour following its golden autumn. Yet in spite of this poverty, the artist has never been greater as a colourist. It is Raphael's masterpiece, perhaps.

The man here portrayed, moreover, was the author of the book which the whole of the XVIth century regarded as a masterpiece—the *Cortegiano*: and he made his own life a most subtle and delicate masterpiece of art—the art of behaving in harmony with his times, of blending his solo with the vast accompaniment of all the human voices of his century. The whole Renaissance worked and dreamed and suffered only to produce a Castiglione. Vittoria Colonna, whom we see in the *Marriage in Cana*, right at the end of the table, leaning on her left elbow and chewing a tooth-pick, wrote to him in decisive terms :

I am not surprised that you have drawn a perfect courtier, for you have only to hold a mirror in front of you and tell what you see in it . . .

And Charles-Quint, who is beside her in this picture, turning his left profile to a serving-man, in the angle of the balustrade, announced the death of Raphael's model to his courtiers thus

I tell you that one of the world's noblest knights is now dead !

Finally, the Francis I, whose profile, painted by Titian, is here too, in the *Galerie du Bord de l'Eau*, meeting Baldassare Castiglione the day after the battle of Marignan, asked him to finish his *Cortegiano* so that it might be an example to future generations. If ever a period was caught up in a book, a book in a man, and a man in a portrait, it is so here.

And this is the place where one can best grasp that fact, here in the midst of these intimates of his. For Chance has surrounded him with the faces of those whom he knew and who loved him. In the Louvre, under the pseudonym of the *Marriage in Cana*, is the great fête of the Renaissance, which he did not live to see, but for which he gave the signal. All the people who appear in it, except perhaps the negro boy who is proffering a cup to Alfonso d'Avalos, had read his book, no matter of what nationality they were, for at the time when this picture was painted by Paul Veronese, in 1562, the *Cortegiano* had already gone into sixty editions. It had been translated into Spanish, French, Latin and English, and the name of Castiglione, pronounced among the hubbub of conversation, the clink of glasses, the rattle of

plates and the droning of fiddles, would be received with acclamation.

Not far away that mysterious allegory—incomprehensible but glowing with colour—in a world of sad voluptuousness, where every hand is grasping something which the eyes do not see, must delight his mythological mind. You know this fantasy of Titian's. A knight in dark armour, as solemn as a magician during an incantation, is placing his hand on the breast of a woman deep in thought. A child is bringing up a bundle of dead wood which he has been to fetch from the forest and which his widespread fingers are grasping with difficulty. The beautiful lady who is so pensive, is holding a dark, translucent object—a ball of crystal, if we may judge by the way her hands are placed to hold it. Another female figure is kneeling, in an attitude of ecstatic prayer. And above are stretched bare arms holding up a basket and fruits and flowers.

This riddle, which intrigues, inspires and is the despair of Titian's commentators, is no doubt one of those learned allegories in which his humanism delighted. The mysterious knight is presumed to be one of his friends, Alfonso d'Avalos, the hero of Tunis. The amorous gentleman a little further on who is multiplying the beauties of his mistress by placing her between two mirrors is in all probability his master, the Marquis Federico Gonzaga,<sup>1</sup> to whom, not inaptly, he wrote one day :

<sup>1</sup> It is to M. Louis Hourticq (*Revue de l'Art ancien et moderne*, 10 August 1912) that we owe this identification, or at any rate this hypo-

The French Ambassador, Saint Marceau, has been to tell the Pope that Your Excellency is young and inexperienced and much addicted to pleasure.

Here he is, then, amid faces familiar to him in his lifetime, resuscitated, as he himself has been, by the greatest masters of the Renaissance, all of whom he loved and admired, without distinction of school

"Very diverse things can please our eyes equally well so much so that it is difficult to say which please us the most," he said, in the *Cortegiano*

For instance in painting, Leonardo da Vinci, Mantegna, Raphael and George de Castelfranco (Giorgione) are all excellent; nevertheless they are all very different from each other so that none of them seems to lack anything whatever in method, since one recognizes that each is perfect in his own style.

Finally, he has had the good fortune to live again in the handiwork of Raphael. Of the artists he has mentioned above, Raphael was certainly the one best able to understand him and to make us understand him. The divine Leonardo would not have been at all suitable. His was a restless dream, an art which was for ever changing and experimenting, a new spirit breaking from its confines and spreading its wings, his was a soul in doubt losing itself in mystery. But Raphael's art was fixed, it was the simplicity of perfection within freely accepted limits, an art which sought nothing and promised nothing—but which keeps

them, which is very probably correct. In an ingenious and brilliant study of certain works by Titian in the Louvre he declines to admit that Alfonso d'Este and Laura Dianti figure in the famous group in the *Sala Carracci* and gives good reasons for recognizing in it Federico Gonzaga, the son of Isabella d'Este, and his mistress, Isabella Boschetti.

faith all the same. Look at this portrait. We are invited to let our thoughts dwell simply upon the immediate object itself: there is no background. The man who did this had no doubt about his own painting. He would never have left it to go away and invent engines of war, or hydraulic apparatus and flying machines. It would be interesting to know what Castiglione thought of the author of the *Giaconda* whom he has replaced. But we do know! Here are his own words:

*Another, one of the best painters in the world, despises the art in which he is so distinguished and applies himself to the study of philosophy, in which he has such strange conceptions and such new fancies that, even with all his painting, he does not know how to represent them!* <sup>1</sup>

This sentence shows us the distance separating Castiglione from Leonardo.

To Raphael, on the other hand, he was very near. Firstly, in life. Castiglione, though a Mantuan by birth, passed the best years of his youth at the Court of Urbino with Duke Guidobaldo and Elisabetta Gonzaga, and he had seen the young master grow up and watched his first flights. He came across him again in Rome, and there they both were—young, handsome, charming and sociable, enthusiastic about antiquity, with the common ties of earlier successes—at large in the Eternal City, unearthing marbles, making plans of the imperial capital, studying Vitruvius. They col-

<sup>1</sup> "Un' altro de' primi pittori del mondo sprezza quell' arte dove è rarissimo, ed essi posto ad imparar filosofia, nella quale ha così strani concetti e nove chimere, che esso con tutta la sua pittura non saprà depingerle"—*Il Cortegiano*, libro secundo XXXIX.

laborated in drawing up a report for Leo X on the measures to be taken to preserve what was left of ancient Rome. The humanist was constantly at the painter's side, advising him and enlightening him, and when he was not there the painter found that he missed something. It was to Castiglione that Raphael addressed the famous letter, so often quoted, on a "certain idea" which he had in his mind regarding beauty.

I must tell you that if I want to paint a beautiful woman, I must first of all see several and then have you beside me to choose the most beautiful.

When Raphael left him for ever, Castiglione was conscious of an immense void. The first time that he returned to Rome after the death of his friend, he wrote to his mother, on 20 July 1520:

I am quite well, but I do not feel as though I were in Rome now that my poor Raphael is no longer here.

But it was not only life which brought them together—it was ideas. In those days, as to-day, there was a secret struggle going on between those two life-long enemies, the portrait painter and his model, each pursuing a different object and yet each having need of the other to attain it. But with Raphael and Castiglione the object was the same—to reproduce poise, naturalness and proportion in a beautiful, healthy and vigorous being, and to do so without apparent effort. We do not know what was being said, four hundred years ago, while the sittings were taking place in the *Borgo Nuovo* palace, during those hot September

afternoons, when, so it is believed, this portrait was painted. Such strict orders were given against admittance that not even the ambassador of Ferrara himself could gain an entrance. But the book is there, as alive as the portrait itself, although no one considered it necessary to translate it into French until a long time afterwards. Castiglione's *Cortegiano* should be read in front of Raphael's *Castiglione*: the same thought is expressed in two languages.

There could have been no disagreement over the costume to be worn.

I like it to tend towards the grave and sombre rather than towards the gay, for it seems to me that there is more grace in black garments than in any other, and if not actually black let them at least be of a dark shade I mean everyday clothes, for there is no doubt that gay, striking colours go better over armour and also that bright clothes, lavishly enriched with lace, are more suitable for public spectacles, fêtes, games, masquerades and such like things, for garments of two colours or more have a certain vivacity and cheerfulness of their own which harmonize well with the games and contests, but for the rest I would like our costume to give evidence of that gravity which so strongly distinguishes the Spanish nation. For outward things bear witness to inward ones. . . .

Thus spoke the humanist: and even when at war and worried with a thousand cares and busy fighting against Bayard near Lodi, he asked his mother to send him a "garment of black damask edged with sable." Raphael did not need to go far to find the most perfect of his harmonies in black, grey and white: his model's ordinary costume supplied him with it.

Nor was there disagreement over the pose, either.

It seems to me that the manners of the Spaniards are more in accordance with the Italian temperament than those of the French, because that *calm gravity* which is peculiar to the Spaniards, appears to suit us Italians better than the sharp vivacity which one notices in the French, in almost all their movements.

That is what the model wrote. Let us see now what the painter did. He gave us, in this picture, a perfect example of static calm and serenity. It is an introspective or concentrated pose, with every line leading one's eye back to the centre of the canvas, and none taking it outside. It caught Rembrandt's attention and he made a sketch of it, which has been preserved for us. It is a precocious sketch, barely more than an indication, with nothing visible except dynamic masses forcing one's attention back to the principal feature. The balance of line, which is a delight to the eye, the equilibrium between the suspension of things in space due to man's effort and their fall according to the law of gravity, agreeing so well with certain of our physiological instincts which are as yet ill-defined—all this conforms to the natural genius of the painter.

For it is obvious that he succeeded here without system, without constraint and almost without thinking of what he was doing. In this there was one resemblance the more to his model.

I find [said Castiglione] one quite universal law, which seems to me to be of more value than any other in all human things, whether words or actions—that is to shun *affectation* as far as one possibly can, regarding it as the most formidable and perilous stumbling block; and, to employ what is perhaps a new expression, to make use in all things of a certain easiness of manner (*sprezzatura*).

*zatura*) which conceals art and proves that what one says or does comes without weariness and almost without thinking of it. One wins favour from that, I think, for everyone knows how difficult it is to produce rare and well-made things. Therefore a facility for producing them excites much wonder. To force one's talents, on the other hand and, as is said, "drag them along by the hair," is extremely ungraceful and takes away the value of anything, however great it may be. Thus one may say that "*that is true art which does not seem to be art.* . . ."

And that we may understand him better he gives a concrete example :

In painting, for instance, one single line drawn without effort, one single stroke of the brush easily made, so that it seems that the hand, guided by no study and no art, went of itself to its goal, will disclose the artist's excellence "

This might be a definition of Raphael as a portrait painter in his best moments and particularly in this portrait. This facility, this tranquillity of the artist producing his work as Nature produces hers, this *sprezzatura* which Castiglione puts before all else, has here found its prototype. If you compare this head with all those which surround it in the Louvre—and most of them are admirable—you will notice the difference. In the others you will be conscious of an intention, a will—something accomplished or conquered—a dazzling victory over matter due to the genius of man. But here the artist has disappeared and left us alone with his model, to which he seems to have given nothing—except life.

Let us examine it, then, as we would a living face. Let us forget art and look at the man himself. The broad forehead, the prominent cheekbones, the

wide-open eyes—the right eye turned inwards a little—the perfect, though almost sensual, mouth, the skull slightly raised in the middle—a peculiarity which is vouched for in other portraits—and bald—a fact which is cleverly concealed in this one—the straight nose, the clear complexion all combine to make us believe that we have before our eyes a complete example of humanity at its healthiest. These are features characteristic of what astrologers call a *Jupiterian of the happy type*. Should one believe them?

The beauty of flowers [says Castiglione] bears witness to the goodness of their fruits; and the same thing applies to the body, as one can learn from the physiognomists who, by means of the features, discover the habits and sometimes the very thoughts of men.

Thus, as his double came to life under the painter's hands, he was thinking that a new trait in his moral character was being prepared for posterity.

It is for us to decipher it. Our knowledge in the matter is certainly not much greater than was that of the XVIth-century painters—it is very feeble and very incomplete—or, to be really honest, it does not exist at all. But in this case the document is quite simple. This portrait of Castiglione is an open book. Every passer-by, without a moment's hesitation, reads the same things in it, a circumspect mind, benevolent and loyal, a calm sensibility, the melancholy of a man so good that injustice continuously astonishes him, dignity without austerity and without mysticism, will-power without obstinacy. Is the passer-by wrong? Castiglione's life shall tell us.

*A LIFE*

THE OUTSTANDING characteristic of his life was loyalty. Born a few miles from Mantua on 6 December 1478 in the old castle of Casatico on the Oglio, near Marcaria, of an ancient Milanese family first established in Milan in the service of the Visconti and the Sforza and then moving to Mantua to serve the Gonzaga, Castiglione had been brought up in that tradition. It was natural enough that his service should be with the Gonzaga. His father, Cristoforo Castiglione, had been severely wounded at Fornovo, beside the Marquis Gonzaga, while fighting against the French, and his mother was herself a member of a younger branch of the Gonzaga family. In his youth, however, he went first to Milan to learn fine manners at the Court of Ludovic the Moor. He was there on that terrible night—a night worthy of the lamentations of a Bossuet—when the young Duchess of Milan, Beatrice d'Este, died suddenly, taking with her all the hope and joy and fortune of the Sforza. Then he came back to Mantua to put himself at the disposal of his natural overlord, the Marquis Gonzaga, who at once sent him off to war. For Baldassare was a swordsman, as were all those of his line, and he had learnt skill-at-arms from the

greatest master of his age, Pietro Monte, at the same time as he had learnt Greek with the best of the Hellenists, Chalcondylas. He remained on campaign for a long time in the neighbourhood of Naples, fighting with the French against Gonzalvo of Cordova. This was the most warlike part of his life

But one fine day the Marquis Gonzaga handed him over with all due ceremony to his brother-in-law, Guidobaldo, Duke of Urbino, who made a diplomat of him. He went to London as ambassador to Henry VII, whose heart he tried to win with Barbary horses and a picture by Raphael. When Guidobaldo died he remained in the service of his successor, Francesco Maria delle Rovere, a nephew of Pope Julius II, and found himself once again a soldier, serving in the Papal army this time and kicking his heels in the trenches before Mirandola. Leo X replaced Julius II on the Pontifical throne and Castiglione set to work to keep his duke in the good graces of the new Pope, abandoning his cuirass and again becoming the humanist and the artist in whom the Medici delighted.

Their delight in him, however, was not great enough to allow him to thwart them from overthrowing the duchy which he represented. The unfortunate little State of Urbino was like a nutshell rocked by every wave as it followed in the wake of St Peter's barque. When the Pope was a Borgia, Urbino was confiscated by Caesar Borgia, when the Pope was a della Rovere, Urbino was

governed by Francesco Maria della Rovere ; and when the Pope was a Medici, Urbino passed into the hands of Lorenzo de Medici, Michael Angelo's famous *Pensieroso*, who in his lifetime never thought of anything. Naturally no one's advice was asked in any one case, and the counsel which Castiglione gave prodigally enough to the Holy See was not listened to. Then, being unable usefully to serve his last master, the loyal Mantuan returned to his former lord, the Marquis Gonzaga, grown old and more considerate by now. Moreover, he had never ceased to be under the orders of the Marchioness, Isabella d'Este, and when the hero of Fornovo died Castiglione remained in the service of his son, Federico, and returned to Rome to represent him at the Papal Court.

This was no sinecure. The functions of an ambassador of a little State in Rome in those days very much resembled those of a deputy of to-day representing a rural constituency in Paris : it was much less a question of negotiating as one power with another as of pleading successfully, of intriguing zealously and of diverting the flow of favours into the selected channel—favours both spiritual and temporal, the strangely mingled interests of earth and heaven. Castiglione was no failure. He succeeded in obtaining for his master the appointment of Captain-General of the Church. He worked to make Federico's uncle, Cardinal Sigismondo Gonzaga, Pope on the death of Leo X, and to get his former master, Francesco Maria della Rovere, at last restored to his State of

Urbino, appointed commander of the Florentine troops as well as of his own. Thus, in the great storm period of the XVIth century and in the midst of conflicting currents which were making Italian politics drift in every direction, he was always steering the same course towards the interests of the Gonzaga and those of their relations and nearest allies, the Dukes of Urbino.

This constancy made him conspicuous. Everyone wanted to have him or retain him in his service. Pope Clement VII ended by carrying him off; he made the Marquis of Mantua hand him over and sent him as Papal Nuncio to Charles-Quint in Spain. It is by no means certain that the Emperor himself did not try to lure him away from the Pope and attach him to himself. In any case he overwhelmed him with favours and Castiglione had just been appointed Bishop of Avila when he died in 1529, just too late to see a little girl of his episcopal city<sup>1</sup> give the lie to his own theory, as expressed in the *Cortegiano* that "no woman has ever known the transports of ecstasy produced by divine love, as Saint Paul did, nor received the stigmata as did Saint Francis of Assisi." Thus, seen externally at a first glance, the man with the large hat and the skull cap appears to us as a kind of *condottiere* of diplomacy, passing from the service of one prince to that of a neighbouring one, and from that of the latter to that of the Pope, handed on from one to the other, half by courtesy and half by force, petted by each one in turn and loyal to all of them.

<sup>1</sup> St. Theresa — Translator's Note.

Our next aspect of him is as a witness so wonderfully situated that he lost nothing of the drama of history. And what a drama ! Luther, Charles-Quint, Cæsar Borgia—what actors ! The piece which humanity acts is always the same, no doubt, but the day often comes when understudies are called upon to play. Castiglione was there to see the début of those artists of whom it might be said that they created their parts in every piece. He was on the spot in attendance upon Louis XII, at Milan, in the midst of Cæsar Borgia's enemies and victims, when Cæsar himself, covered with the dust of his journey, appeared on a post horse, threw himself down before the King of France and by his talkativeness and humour won him to his cause. He was on the spot when Julius II, old, angry and gouty, burning with martial zeal, in mid-winter, with his white beard and his white robe covered with snow, passed through the breach into Mirandola. He was one of that hunting party at Corneto when Leo X, booted and on horseback, wearing a white jerkin and followed by his cardinals wearing red ones, was seen chasing the wild boar and planting the banner of Saint Peter in the very centre of a miraculous hunt, whilst his chaplain was lamenting that His Holiness had started forth without surplice or stole, and was asking himself what could be done if the Faithful came to kiss His Holiness's feet ! . . . And when this same Leo X put down his magnifying glass and his miniatures in order to read and re-read, with his forehead wrinkled with anxiety, the new book

by a certain "Brother Martin,"<sup>1</sup> Castiglione was there to see him. Finally, he was in Spain when Charles-Quint, hearing of the capture of Rome, began to laugh at first, but then to weep, and later on, when the Emperor sent a challenge to Francis I, it was Baldassare who was appointed as his second. One might, in other ages, have been a witness of greater things but one could never have seen things more picturesque or more expressive in their natural *décor*, or arranged by artists of greater genius.

The scene was very varied. One day there would be races, in which the Barbary horses from Mantua would be taking part. Castiglione wrote to the Marquis Federico

I ordered Zuccone to enter both Your Excellency's horses for the first race so that if one finished badly the other would take his place. At the start, the grey horse Serpentino passed all the others and kept the lead for about half the length of the piazza until they reached the Campo. The chestnut was second, but as Zuccone had told the jockey not to press him before reaching the Rue du Borgo, he let a horse belonging to Cardinal Petrucci pass him.

In the race for fillies, Your Excellency's horse was first and the Archbishop of Nicosia's second. They ran in that order up to the Borgo, where Your Excellency's horse went several lengths ahead and reached the Palio before Nicosia's horse was at the fountain. But just as the page was about to touch the Palio an archer of the Bargello got in his way, so that the boy could not touch it. Nicosia's page then came up and touched it first so it was to him that the Palio was awarded. I was at the Castello and unable to realize what had happened until the messenger whom I sent came back. The Palii were taken to His Holiness and I explained to him what had occurred, as well as to the governor and the senator, and everyone admitted that we had

<sup>1</sup> Lather

been very badly treated I was determined to claim the Palio, but the governor told the Pope that it stood to reason that whoever had touched the Palio first must have it, but that the man who had got in the way would have to pay for everybody. After much discussion the archer who was to blame was thrown into prison, and the senator and the governor both promised that he would not be released until we had won a Palio exactly like the one which he had prevented us from having I demanded, in addition, that he should be hanged or sent to the galleys or that at least he should be given four or five turns with the cord. . . .

Another time it would be a Conclave :

To-day a thing happened which has very rarely occurred up till now · the doors of the Conclave were opened with great ceremony and respect The cardinals all came to the doors and knocked on them, informing the bishops (there were eight archbishops or Patriarchs guarding the *Porte de la Rota* through which food was passed to the members of the Conclave) that Monseigneur Grimani was in danger of death and begging them to open the doors Consequently the ambassadors were summoned, but only myself and the Portuguese ambassador were available The doors were opened and we saw all the cardinals with torches in their hands, for the room was very dark Then Monseigneur Santa Croce, in his capacity of Doyen of the Sacred College, told us that Monseigneur Grimani was in peril of death and that the doctors had taken an oath to that effect He begged the ambassadors to tell their princes that the doors had been opened for this reason only, that matters were taking their normal course, and that they were prepared to do their duty point by point. Monseigneur de Como confirmed this announcement and then Monseigneur Grimani was carried out on a chair and the Conclave was shut in afresh I fear that his Reverence will die all the same for he seems very bad Perhaps we shall know to-morrow who is to be Pope

ROME, the last day of 1521.

This witness of everything participated in everything as well. It was not only his gift of observation and his wide-open eyes which were of use

to him all his qualities played their parts. In any other age one could scarcely imagine a man so gifted in so many different ways "Specialization" has become, in our days, almost a dogma. A man who is interested in several arts or sciences and will not consent to dispense with all his faculties save one, excites a chronic mistrust. The man, on the other hand, who remains obstinately indifferent to any ideas foreign to his own profession, inspires in intelligent persons the respect which Hindoos have for a fakir. But that is not without its inconveniences with regard to sociability. For a specialist is like a man who can make only one gesture, always the same. When people have no further need for that gesture they have no further need for him either. Placed among other men, whose movements, though less perfect, are more varied, he reminds them of an automaton, and though superior in one point he appears, as regards his ability as a whole, to be inferior.

But the man who has dabbled in many kinds of knowledge and been interested in various arts and sports, and is thus able to render society the different services which it expects of him, as and when required, has always been preferred by "the world," just as by adopting in turn the various attitudes suggested by human emotions he appears, to connoisseurs of souls, more "aesthetic." In Castiglione one finds a perfect example of this kind of "social man," to whom nothing human is foreign and who, indeed, must be thus if he is to harmonize with his age. To order an edition

from Manuzio and armour from Missaglia, to supervise a stable of racehorses and suggest subjects for the frescoes of the *Stanze*, to lead fifty lances to war and compose the prologue for a comedy, to draw up a plan for a dovecote or one for the decoration of a theatre, to unearth from under the Rome of the Popes, the Rome of the Emperors and then to go as ambassador to London or Madrid and fill the diplomatic archives with shrewd, prudent, precise, carefully-worded letters referring to the most subtle negotiations—all that, in a man of that epoch and rank, was not dilettantism and clever pastime, but the obligations of his appointment or the services expected of his talents.

The equilibrium of his features is not deceptive, then. We have not what is commonly called a “great man” before us, because there was nothing excessive about him and because greatness only appears in a man, as in a building, when some disproportion is apparent in the different parts. But we have a complete man—one who did everything gracefully, a model of equilibrium in a society of very unstable minds and consequently in very intricate situations.

Yet in this perfectly ordered mask there is one thing which attracts us more than all the rest—and that is the eyes. Castiglione believed that the eyes revealed the fundamentals of a human being. In the *Cortegiano* he devotes the following passage to them :

They are faithful messengers bearing an embassy from the heart. They often show the passion which is within more

effectively than do the tongue itself, or letters or other messengers, so that they not only disclose thoughts but often lovingly embrace the heart of the loved one. For these eager spirits which issue from the eyes to be begotten near the heart, entering similarly into the eyes which they seek, like an arrow to its mark, come naturally to the heart as if it were their dwelling and there mingle with those other spirits, and, with the very subtle kind of blood which they take with them they infect the blood near the heart which they approach, warming it and making it like themselves, ready to receive the vision which they have brought as if purposely for it. Thus these messengers, constantly going and returning, by this road from eyes to heart and carrying back the priming and the tinderbox of beauty and grace, set alight, by the wind of desire, that flame which is so ardent and which never ceases to burn.

Let us question his eyes then, that we may penetrate a little further into his soul. Their reply is very melancholy. They are benevolent, but sad, clear and bathed in blue light, but humid, as though wet with tears too tender not to be pained, as well as amused, by everything which they reflect. We must seek something else in his life, then, besides public facts and official words, apparent success—the mask which was the envy of all.

Compared with his contemporaries Castiglione could be classed as a “happy man” he was not assassinated, nor flung into a dungeon, nor exiled for ever, nor ruined by civil war, nor saddened by the loss of many of those near to him, and, taking it all round, the causes which he fought for were triumphant in the end—even in his lifetime—which is the supreme honour for a man of action. Of enemies he had just enough to prove to himself that he did not pass unnoticed by evil men and fools—and he had innumerable friends. But

things take on the semblance of the souls which they afflict, and just as it is said that there are no illnesses but only sick persons, so one can say, in a certain sense, that there are no misfortunes but only unfortunate human beings. Castiglione was one of these. He had not that robust scepticism and that enormous appetite for success in which Aretino, the fat, bearded majordomo whom we see in the *Marriage in Cana* in the Louvre, rejoiced. The brilliance of his own career did not prevent him from feeling the effects of all the misery which afflicted Italy in that terrible XVIth century in which he lived : and in spite of his equable soul, one can here and there guess his feelings.

First, patriotic grief. He hid it as much as possible and kept quiet about it, but it was gnawing at him unceasingly. Sometimes he gave himself away by a word or two. Once it was *à propos* costume. He complained that it was always being imposed upon Italians by foreigners of one kind or another. The invasion of his country by the fashions of the "great powers" seemed to him a sign of another invasion, *augurio di servitu.*

"There is not a nation which has not made us its prey, and little though there is now left for them to take, they still continue to pillage. But I do not want to talk of such painful subjects," says Federigo Fregoso, in the *Cortegiano*. That was all.

On another occasion it was *à propos* the preference shown by the Italians to letters rather than to arms.

With all their literary knowledge the Italians have shown little courage in arms for a long time past. But it would be still more shameful for us to publish the fact than for the French to be ignorant of letters. The best thing is to be silent on a subject which one cannot recall without pain.

And he passes to another subject. The author of the *Cortegiano* was, in every sense of the expression, what M. Paul Bourget calls "the intellectual moment in a warlike race", but the "moment" did not forget the "race." When the humanist, strolling through Rome, wrote the verses which Du Bellay translated thus

Sacrez costaux, et vous sanctes ruines,  
Qui le seul nom de Rome retenez

Las, peu à peu cendre vous devenez,  
Fable du peuple et publiques rapines !

Tristes désirs, vivez donc contens  
Car si le Temps finist chose si dure  
Il finira la peine que j'endure.<sup>1</sup>

it was at heart the soldier and the patriot who was complaining. And the ruin which he mourns was not that of fallen marbles alone.

There were, too, life's domestic embarrassments

<sup>1</sup> Joachim du Bellay *les Antiquitez de Rome* VII *passim*. Castiglione's text is as follows:

Superbi colli e voi sacre ruine  
Che'l nome sol di Roma anchor tenete

In poco cener pur conviene sete  
E fatte al vulgo cil favola al fine.

Vivro dunque fra miei martir contento,  
Che se'l Tempo da fin è a ciò ch' è in terra  
Dara forse anchor fine al mio tormento.

Too much the great lord not to incur debts, and too much the honest bourgeois to remain indifferent to them, the Duke of Urbino's ambassador groaned at being unceasingly forced to ask for money from his old mother living among her farm hands at Casatico. And his sufferings were not lessened by receiving a letter such as the following, which we should read in front of his portrait in the Louvre if we would realize how precarious was the framework which upheld these sumptuous Renaissance establishments :

Francesco Piperario asks to be paid daily, and with reason, but I do not know how I can comply I have sold several loads of grain but the price is falling every day and the cost of carts and horses is considerable I have had a lot of trouble with our peasants over the cartage of this grain I have agreed to pay half the cost of the journey to Desenzano, which is no further than Mantua But they will not hear of that, as they say they would have to find their own food and spend a night away from home, which would cost more than going to Mantua They declare that the stones on the road break up their carts and have many other things to grumble at So that for this reason and many others I am very anxious for you to return home But I know how hopeless is this wish for you to come back ! . . .

When he read complaints such as this, the provincial squireen which in many ways he still remained, was momentarily re-born beneath his cosmopolitan humanism. He recalled the old manor house, the river and its mill, the litigious neighbours, the devoted servants, the cunning peasants and all the familiar surroundings of his youth. It was as though the tree felt its roots drawing it downwards again. Then he would forget it all in a conversation about Plato with

Pietro Bembo or Bibbiena But a tinge of melancholy would none the less remain with him

Deeper still in his heart he bore the melancholy of a sentimental solitude, which took many years to pass away Just as he was reaching the age when marriage no longer tempted him, everyone wanted him to marry He did not refuse, but let the match-makers do their best, with an amused eye on their manœuvres , and little by little, simply as a result of the passing of time, their efforts came to nothing in the most natural way in the world He was to marry, in succession, a Medici, a Martinengo, a Visconti, a Boiardo, a Stanga, a Cavalieri, a Correggio, a Borromeo, a Trivulzio, a Rangone and others besides so many were there and so certain was it in each case that a whole book could be written entitled *The Nuptial Candidatures of B Castiglione* In the end this conspiracy on the part of the whole of Italy to make him happy resulted in inducing him to marry, at the age of thirty-eight, a girl of barely fifteen, a certain Ippolita Tovelli, whose father, the Count of Monte-chiarugo, had been a professional *condottiere* and whose mother had thought it her duty to murder her first husband while he was asleep in bed

Castiglione was in no way frightened at this atavism, and he was right. It was a delightful marriage, referred to even in the convents

"I rejoice with you, my sister, in thinking that you are marrying so noble a knight as Messire Baldassare," wrote a nun of the order of *Corpus Christi* to the young fiancée. "He is a man of

whom everyone speaks, nowadays, as being superior to all others in talent and charm as well as in beauty."

But they were not often together. Since Baldassare was in Rome, looking after his master's interests, whilst Ippolita remained in the old family palace at Mantua busy with her newly-born children, their household was separated, but that seemed only to unite them more closely. She would write to him thus :

I want one thing only and that is to see you again and when I think that I have got to live another fortnight without you, it is as though fourteen swords were piercing my heart

To which he replied :

Though you have been eighteen days without a letter from me, my dear wife, I have certainly not been four hours without thinking of you And since then you must have had lots of letters from me, so that I have made honourable amends for the past But in truth you are very much more to blame than I am, for you only write to me when you have nothing else to do But still your last letter was a very long one, thank God ! You tell me to find out from our Count Ludovic how much you love me. I could retort by telling you to ask the Pope how much I love you, for all Rome certainly knows, and everyone tells me that I am sad and preoccupied because I am not with you I do not attempt to deny it and so everyone is hoping that I will send to fetch you from Mantua and bring you here to live with me in Rome Think it over and tell me if you would like to come And tell me, joking apart, if there is anything in Rome which you would like if so I will not fail to bring it for you But I should like to know what would really please you most, for I shall turn up one fine morning at a moment when you least expect me, to find you still in bed and declaring that you had just been dreaming about me—in which statement there will not be a word of truth ! I cannot tell you yet what day I shall be leaving Rome, but I hope it will be soon Meanwhile, do not

forget me, go on loving me, and tell yourself that I never forget you and that I love you infinitely—more than I can say—and that I commend myself to you with all my heart.

ROME, the last day of August, 1519

He was destined to see but little more of her. A year later, that is to say, after only four years of married life, he had a letter from her when he was again in Rome, announcing that she had just been delivered of a daughter. She apologized for the fact that it was not a son, and added that she was rather ill.

"I would like to know if the baby has blue eyes," our diplomat answered. But she did not receive that answer. She was dead. Isabella d'Este and her son, at the Mantuan Court, were very worried to know how they could best inform the poor, absent husband, who was very much in love, and occupied in weeping literary tears over the ruins of antiquity in far-off Rome, that his own fireside, but newly built, had crashed in ruins with his happiness. It was decided in the end to despatch a messenger to Cardinal Bibbiena, who was his intimate friend, to tell the latter to break the news gradually.

The messenger arrived, one fine August evening, whilst Castiglione was at supper and discoursing merrily—perhaps, however, with that tinge of melancholy which could scarcely have ever left him, since it persisted even at the happiest period of his life—the period when the portrait was painted. Bibbiena, having consulted with Cardinal Rangone, decided not to spoil the evening, and merely

handed Castiglione a business letter from the Marquis Federico Gonzaga. Not till the next day did the two cardinals, accompanied by the captain of the Pontifical Guard, Annibal Rangone, bring the sad message to Castiglione. The humanist's grief was heart-rending. And these men, who had seen so many tragic sights, with dry eyes more often than not, wept when they saw him weeping, thus proving how true it is that events only make their maximum of impression on us through the medium of a human soul. As for Castiglione himself, he was always to wear mourning for his short-lived happiness. He wandered about Rome like a soul in torment, and ended by seeking consolation from the Holy Father himself. Nor was he disappointed. The Pope invited him to a hunting party!

He was destined in the end, during the last years of his life, to endure the melancholy of a still greater ruin—that of his policy as Papal Nuncio at the Court of Charles-Quint. We can have but a vague idea of the diplomacy of that epoch. Inclined though we are to assert that our modern diplomacy is unstable and impotent, we are accustomed, nowadays, to systems of alliances which last many years, sometimes for a quarter of a century, and when they are changed the alterations are made slowly and with intelligible gradations. But in the XVIth century it was a matter of abrupt *volte-face* very liable to unhorse the knight concerned. Negotiations, moreover, were interspersed with violent incidents which no man could foresee,

for modern discipline was a thing practically unknown in the armies of those days and everyone fought or, on the other hand, treated for his own ends Julia Cartwright's fine work on Castiglione gives a summary of his career as a diplomat and should be read to gain some idea of its infinite complexity<sup>1</sup>. Placed between the Pope and the Emperor, by both of whom he was equally loved and admired, but who had no great liking and no admiration at all for each other, Castiglione spent his time in reconciling these two "halves of God" —as arduous, punctilious and delicate a task as there could be. He had been working at it for three years when Clement VII, disregarding advice, allowed his policy to become so hopelessly entangled in contradictions that it ended in the catastrophe which, in its reaction, was destined to kill him.

The date of the sack of Rome, 1527, was one of those dates which cut a century in two, a red book-marker in the confused mass of pages of the history of the times, resembling the date 1870-71 in XIXth-century Europe. It astounded the universe and struck it with greater horror than the capture of Constantinople had done. The capture of Constantinople had been like the death of a feeble old man, who for a long time had been getting less and less important, and whose end had been hourly expected. But the capture of Rome was like a thunderbolt striking an organism in the

<sup>1</sup> *Baldassare Castiglione the Perfect Courtier His Life and Letters 1478-1529* By Julia Cartwright (Mrs Ady) 2 vols., London 1908

prime of youth and bursting with vigour. It proved that no man was safe and thereby terrified everyone. It was, too, one of those abrupt returns to primitive barbarism, which ruined the one city in the world wherin civilization and humanism had amassed the greatest number of treasures. The Emperor, doubtless, desired the capture of Rome, but he could not have wanted what followed. The soldiery broke entirely loose from its leaders and caused the conquerors to tremble almost as much as the conquered. In this we can see yet another resemblance to the last convulsions of the Commune. It would seem, indeed, that it was the same giant in each case—the Atlas of the people, sleeping in his chains, who, rousing himself at long intervals, shakes the table at which the gods live and love, play, strive and amuse themselves, and then re-assumes for a long time, sometimes for centuries, his stooping and motionless posture.

No one was so heart-broken as Castiglione, for if there was one man in the world whose task it was to prevent this catastrophe, he was that man, and he had not prevented it. And not only had he not prevented it, he had foreseen it, for which Clement VII could not forgive him. For prophets of evil, always unpopular, become even more so when events prove them right. The diplomat's activity, however, was not relaxed. From the moment he heard the news of the sack of Rome and of the captivity of the Pope he encouraged manifestations on the part of the Spanish clergy in favour of his master, and sent an express despatch

to him to reassure him. Once Clement VII was out of danger Castiglione took up his able polemical pen to defend the Papacy and its temporal power against the attacks of the disciples of Erasmus and to denounce a latent Lutheranism which had spread even to Catholic Spain. In the end he succeeded. The understanding between the two sovereigns was renewed and the departure of Charles Quint for Italy was decided upon. Castiglione's long effort then received its reward, as did his disinterestedness, for with a dignified feeling very rare in those times he had refused all the Emperor's favours until the day when peace—and a peace with honour for the Papacy—had been concluded. But the marks of the experience were too deep to be effaced. He knew happiness no more. In a letter to his son, written in Latin, which was to be his will, he quoted sadly these lines by Virgil

Disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque labore;  
Fortunam ex aliis.

which, in his opinion, epitomized his life.

Another cause of melancholy, the greatest after a certain age is reached, was the absence of those whom he had loved. People died young in those days, and groups of affinities were quickly broken up to enjoy life in the XVIth century one had to love little or else forget much. Castiglione was not successful at forgetting the faces which had delighted his youth—those at the Court of Urbino, those of his brothers-in-arms who had fallen heroically, facing the enemy or in ambush, of philosophers with their subtle discourse, of artists with their

fresh enthusiasms, of women—and especially those women whose smiles, now four hundred years old, still illumine the museums of France and Italy.

“ So many of my friends and masters have left me alone in this life, as if in an uninhabited desert,” he used to say.

Nothing in the world which surged round him seemed to equal what had disappeared. In his youth he had amused himself at the expense of older people, when he heard them say : “ Ah, if you had only known Duke Borso ! Ah, if you had only heard Piccinino ! ” and he had suspected that these people were weeping less for the merits of Duke Borso than for their own youth. But there comes a day when each of us, without noticing it very much, begins to say, “ Ah, if you had only known Duke Borso ! ” or again, like old Nestor in the first book of the Iliad : “ No, I have never seen and I shall never see men like Pirthoos, Dryas, Æneas, Exadius, PolypHEME ! . . . ” Castiglione, more than most men, had a veneration for his own memories—that yearning for everything of oneself that one has buried with those one has loved. Unceasingly, amidst the clamour of the world, he allowed himself to give ear to and to regret what the poet calls :

The inflexion of dear voices which have been stilled

He wanted to hear them once again before he died and—since they remained dumb—to give himself the illusion, he made them talk. He published the *Cortegiano*.

### III

#### A BOOK

THE CORTEGIANO IS NOT A BOOK  
it is a man, a man brought up on many books, it is true, but more still on experience, facts and sights seen with his own eyes, put in their right perspective and mellowed by the passage of the years—that patina of time which modern literature scarcely knows

Twenty-one years elapsed between its first conception in 1507 and its publication in 1528. Baldassare was thinking about it all his life, working on it, coming back to it, touching it up, showing it to his friends and then, having given it to everyone, he died<sup>1</sup>.

Its success was enormous, and editions in every language followed each other rapidly. The *Cortegiano* was already famous before it was ever published—it had been bandied about, *sub rosa*, in manuscript, and had been copied here and there. It was this last fact which made Castiglione decide to have it published officially, "much preferring," he said, "to see it issued imperfect from my own hand than to have it mutilated by the copyists."

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Il Cortegiano* of Count Baldassare Castiglione, annotated and illustrated by Vittorio Cian, Florence, 1910; and Baltasar Castilho, *Le Parfait Courtisan*, translated by Gabriel Chapuis, Tournageau, Paris, 1585.

## *Celebrities of the Italian Renaissance*

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He was then in Spain. He revised his manuscript, touched up certain passages here and there, corrected the copyists' mistakes and then sent it to Aldo Manuzio. He wrote thus to his servant, one Cristoforo Tirabosco :

I have sent my book to Venice to be printed by the Asola printers. The book has been placed in the hands of the Magnifico Jean-Baptiste Ramusio, secretary to the Venetian Government, and His Magnificence will give the printers all instructions necessary in the matter. I am writing to Venice to say that a thousand and thirty copies of the work are to be printed and that I propose to pay half the expenses, because, of this thousand, five hundred copies are to be mine. The thirty supplementary copies will also be for me and are to be printed on special paper *de luxe*, as close and fine-woven as possible—in fact the best that can be found in Venice.

On receipt of my letter you are to go at once to Venice, find the Magnifico Ramusio and give him the enclosed letter, which informs him that you are my servant and that you have orders to confirm whatever His Magnificence may decide regarding the price of publication. This, then, is what you have got to arrange. Before everything else the paper *de luxe* for the thirty copies. You are to search everywhere to get it and you are to show a sample of it to the said Magnifico Ramusio. If he is satisfied with it, then you are to buy it, but you are not to do so without his approval. As regards other expenses you will do whatever His Magnificence directs and you will hand over to him whatever money he may require. When you start, you had better take fifty ducats, which I will tell my mother to give you, and if you need more she will give it you on your return to Mantua. When the book is printed I intend to present a hundred and thirty of the copies which I am reserving for myself to my friends and relations and to sell the remaining four hundred in order to recoup myself for the money I have spent and perhaps make a little profit if possible. It would be as well, I think, to sell the whole lot to one bookseller, to save trouble . . .

VALLADOLID, 9th April, 1527.

The *de luxe* copies were for the Marquis Federico Gonzaga, for the latter's mother, Isabella d'Este, for Emilia Pia, for the young Duchess of Urbino and a few other beautiful ladies for the humanists, also—the Bishop of Bayeux, Ludovico da Canossa, Messire Jean-Baptiste Ramusio, and finally one single copy on vellum, bound "in the most beautiful way, in leather, embellished with knots and foliage and with gilt edges," was no doubt intended for Charles-Quint.

From its first appearance in 1528 the *Cortegiano* became a book that every man of the world was obliged to read, something which one lived on, which even the least intellectual persons knew about and which was found on those shelves which were poorest in books and where ordinarily only things of practical use were to be seen. But that does not mean that it is to be regarded as the Gospel of a new age. Like all books whose popularity is immediate, the *Cortegiano* did not go beyond its own times. When one walks quicker than the crowd one walks alone. But it gives all of us some conception of the dim ideal of the best men of that period. It is a portrait, not precisely of the "perfect courtier"—for in many passages in it Court life is criticized—but of the "man at Court" and not only of such but of what we would call nowadays a "man of the world," and in many points simply of the honest man or honest woman. It was, in fact, addressed to anyone of that period, except a monk, who could read. And it was written in the simplest, most lucid and most familiar style.

It was not, then, accurately speaking, a philosophical work, but a manual on how to live. But in truth all the philosophies of the world end by being manuals on how to live, unless they end in nothing at all—which is no rare thing. But here the form in which the advice is couched, without being didactic, is nevertheless much more precise than it is with the philosophers, and its application is more direct. Hence, though we may doubt that the *Cortegiano* shows us the exact physiognomy of the man of the Renaissance period, it certainly shows us the physiognomy he would have liked to possess. A portrait painter's true skill lies not in producing a portrait which is like his model, but in producing one which his model would wish to be like. And in that Castiglione certainly succeeded. Of this there is an abundance of evidence; and as an intriguing example of it we may quote that of the famous Vittoria Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara. In 1524, long before the publication of the book, when she had spent the whole winter reading the manuscript in her retreat at Marino, she wrote thus to Castiglione :

I feel myself as little capable of saying what I think of it as you are, so you pretend, of saying what you think of the beauty of the Duchess. But as I promised to give you my opinion and as I do not feel obliged to pay you compliments on what you know better than I do, I will tell you the bare truth quite simply. I affirm, with an oath which will prove the force of my affirmation—*por vida del Marchés, my señor*—that I have never seen and that I never expect to see a work in prose superior, or even equal, to this. Apart from the novelty and beauty of the subject, the excellence of the style is such that little by little, without the least shock, we are led up to pleasant and fruitful

heights, and that we ascend unceasingly without noticing that we are no longer on the plain whence we started. Our pathway is so well cultivated and adorned that it is difficult to say whether art or nature has done the more to embellish the journey. I had not meant to say more, but I cannot pass over in silence another point which excites my admiration to an even higher degree. It has always seemed to me that a man writing in Latin has the same advantage over other authors as goldsmiths, working in gold, have over other men working in copper. However simple their work may be, the excellence of their material is such that it cannot fail to be beautiful, whereas bronze or copper, however delicately and marvellously they may be wrought, will never equal gold and will always suffer by comparison with it. But your modern Italian has so rare a majesty that its charm need not yield to that of any Latin work in prose.

There is one quality which she does not mention and which is precisely the one which is the salvation of the book—and that is life—the life of an impassioned discussion, bringing on the scene people who actually existed, with their individual traits perfectly recognizable, and a battle of ideas which actually took place and which made a profound impression upon the author. It will be enough to say who the people were, and what the battle was about, to explain the whole book.

In March 1507 chance brought together at the top of the rock of Urbino, in the palace with the tall spires which overlooks the city, some of the most brilliant minds of the Renaissance, and also some of its most notorious assassins. There were together there for several days Pietro Bembo, the humanist, who was later a cardinal, Giuliano de Medici, the good tyrant, who sleeps nowadays in Michael Angelo's *Night*, Cristoforo Romano, the

author of our bust of Beatrice d'Este in the Louvre ; Francesco Maria della Rovere, the warrior whom one can see in the Uffizi, painted by Titian, in armour, with his general's baton on his hip ; Dovizi da Bibbiena, called *Il Bel Bernardo*, formerly a perfect secretary in the love affairs of young Florentines, and a future cardinal, known by the portrait which Raphael painted of him, now in the Pitti Palace ; Ludovico da Canossa, the Franco-phile diplomat who later became Bishop of Bayeux ; Ludovico Pio, the dauntless captain ; Ottaviano Fregoso, the future Doge of Genoa, destined for a cruel end, and his brother Federigo Fregoso ; Gasparo Pallavicino, a misogynist of twenty-two, and also the soldier-poet, Cæsar Gonzaga ; Accolti, called the *Unico Aretino*, less genial than his famous namesake, but himself a brilliant extemporeizer and unusually clever ; and finally Castiglione himself, recently back from his embassy to London—all in the prime of life, and as happy as people setting sail together who have not yet been separated by storms nor dulled by ports of call.

Why were all these people at Urbino ? In considering this eagle's nest perched so high in one of the most desolate and inaccessible districts in Italy, and off the main routes and lines of communication of the population, it is not easy to understand its power of attraction for the best minds of the XVIth century : and less easy still to understand how those three geniuses of grace and proportion, Raphael, Bramante and Castiglione himself, issued from it. There are two things in explanation,

however the excellent library of the Dukes of Urbino and the presence of Elisabetta Gonzaga. Inquirers and talkers found there a treasury of books and a beautiful lady who would listen to them. What could be more decisive? "Do you expect to stay long at this reception?" someone asked a brilliant Restoration wit. "I shall remain a long time if people listen to me," was the naïve reply. Pietro Bembo, of Venetian origin, came to stay a few days at Urbino, with forty ducats in his pocket. People listened to him. He stayed there for six years.

The Duchess [said Castiglione] seemed like a chain holding us pleasantly united, so that never was agreement or cordial love between brothers greater than that which existed between us. A similar friendship was evidenced between us and the ladies, with whom one could converse freely and sincerely; and each of us was allowed to talk, sit, joke or laugh with whichever of them he pleased. But Madame the Duchess's wishes were held in such great reverence that this very liberty acted as a powerful curb, and there was not one of us who did not consider it the greatest pleasure in the world to please this lady or who did not consider it very regrettable to displease her.

The daytime was spent in hunting, tournaments, rides and games of all sorts, in which Duke Guidobaldo could not take much part as he was crippled with gout, but in which he, a connoisseur, acted as judge, with scrupulous fairness. In the evenings they used to dance, or have music and singing, accompanying themselves on the lute or *gravicembalo*, or play *scartino*, or talk—especially talk. The Duke, owing to his health, would retire to his own rooms soon after supper. Then everyone

went to the Duchess's apartments. Ladies and knights would sit in a circle, grouping themselves without formality at the dictates of mutual liking or chance, but alternately, first a knight and then a lady, until there were only men left—they being more numerous—and these would sit anyhow. A subject would be proposed, some problem of morals or love, a cryptic motto, an ideal of life or of feminine beauty—anything which might disclose someone's secret hopes or vague regrets. There would be diffidence at first and excuses: the subject would be declared unsuitable. But the Duchess was inflexible. This was the price payable for the success of the game, of the *gioco*. Then someone would take his chance, and put forward an opinion, which would always be liable to shock someone else. There would be an answer, and an answer to the answer: a third opinion would run counter to the two first and conversation would soon become general.

This "general conversation" was a dialogue in form and a lecture in subject—to say nothing of its stage effects: entrances, exits, gestures, miming, which sometimes made it resemble a comedy. It was not a "lecture" because it was a dialogue, and because everyone took part in it, entered into the subject, cut it short or switched it into another channel when so inclined; but it was not an ordinary dialogue because since everything that was said was heard by everyone nothing was confidential. Moreover, in order that everyone could take a share, it was very necessary that the

subject chosen should be of the most general nature, and in that it was something like a "lecture." But what not even the best arranged lecture or the best regulated stage scene possesses is the charm of improvisation, the joy in seeing ideas born and thoughts grow and take shape like clay in the potter's hands, with the hesitations and the groping, but also with the vivacity and freshness, of anything that is coming to life for the first time.

Such was the kind of talk at Urbino in those rooms which had been built by Luciano di Laurana and decorated by Ambrogio da Milano, Domenico Rosselli, Diotallevi, Francesco di Giorgio Martini, where cupids and angels, carrying garlands, hunting the wild boar, dancing, riding on dolphins, brightened the friezes and the chimney-pieces, where flowers and eagles, shells, cherubim and fish with human heads, vines with twining tendrils and corn bursting into ear, framed the doorways with a decorative fancy as fine, as delicate and as varied as any ever seen. Surrounded by the marvels of *intarsia natura* by Jacomo, overlooked by the figures of the *Arts and Sciences* of Juste of Ghent and Melozzo da Forli, now in London and Berlin, thoroughly impregnated with that atmosphere which Raphael breathed in his childhood, the talkers had only to raise their eyes or make a gesture to summon the most exquisite realities as witnesses to their ideals.

The woman who controlled the debates was the beautiful Emilia Pia, widow of the Montefeltro who fought against the French at Fornovo. She

never left Elisabetta Gonzaga, who delegated full powers to her to direct the conversation. Her fine intellectual head, her straight, solid and rather masculine profile, her biting irony discouraged lovers, as later on her smiling death, far from pious, was to alarm the devout. She was simply a brain—with beautiful eyes. She adored the clash of words and ideas, quick retorts and the finesse of attack, the sort of philosophic tournaments in which the women of those days were not afraid to see scholars do battle in their honour.

In the ordinary way the women were better able to judge these contests than to understand them. But Emilia Pia did understand them, and when the passages of arms became too subtle or rancorous she would call the competitors sharply to order. One evening Giuliano de Medici was engaged with Gasparo Pallavicino in an abstruse wrangle on the feminine character of "matter" as opposed to the masculine character of "form," or on the predominance of matter in woman and of form in men.

"For the love of God," said Emilia Pia, "let your 'matter' and your 'form' and your masculine and feminine alone for once in a way, and speak in a way we can understand : for though we heard and quite understood the ill which Signor Gasparo and Signor Ottaviano said of us, we can make nothing of your way of defending us!"

Their discourse was interrupted by all kinds of incidents. One evening the sound of footsteps and loud voices resounded under the arches and

suddenly they saw the young Francesco Maria della Rovere and his retinue, just returned from a journey, appear in the torchlight. He had asked the whereabouts of his aunt, the Duchess, and had been told that she was presiding over a literary circle where the good qualities which a courtier ought to possess were being discussed—and he had hurried thither so that he should not lose a word of such an intriguing debate. On another occasion all the ladies sprang up at a sign from the Duchess and surrounded young Pallavicino, threatening to slay him if he continued to speak ill of women To which, amid shouts of laughter, he retorted

“ You can see very well that you are wrong ! Here you are, wanting to use force, and in that way close the discussion by what one might call a *licenzia bracciesca* ! ”

It was during these evening meetings that there gradually shaped itself in their minds the type of the perfect courtier, the *Cortegiano*, which was re-drawn later on by Castiglione. Reading the account of this *gioco* it would seem that they amused themselves in putting together a work of art bit by bit, in gradually carving out a precious statue. Each of them took a hand in it in turn. This lasted four whole evenings. First of all Ludovico da Canossa enumerated the talents required by a courtier, and his moral and intellectual character. Then Federigo Fregoso explained the use which this courtier should make of his talents and Bibbiena the use that he should make of his mind. Giuliano

de Medici next showed what the ideal woman at his side should be like. Ottaviano Fregoso described the perfect *Cortegiano* in his relations with and behaviour to his sovereign. And, finally, Pietro Bembo took up this artistically worked clay and breathed into it the divine breath which was to make it live.

The evening on which the final touch was put to it may be taken as the culminating point of Humanism. Renaissance thought here reached its zenith. They had assembled as usual in a large room in the Urbino palace. The evening was well advanced, for they had had to search the whole palace to find Ottaviano Fregoso, who was busy giving an account of the perfect courtier to his prince. While waiting for him they had had some dancing. At last he appeared, and they started off with the question of whether the perfect courtier ought to be in love. It had already been settled that to be a real statesman the *Cortegiano* ought not to be young. And it had also been agreed that it was ridiculous for a man of ripe years to be in love. Nevertheless a man was not complete, said Bembo, unless he loved someone. How, then, would he get over the contradiction, he was asked.

“Quite easily,” he retorted, “if one knows what ideal love is.”

Love is nothing else but a certain desire to enjoy beauty, and since this desire is only exercised on known things, knowledge must always precede desire—the latter by its nature always tends towards what is good, but it is blind and does not recognize it. Nature, however, has so ordained things that to all clear-sighted virtue there is joined an appetitive virtue and since in our soul

there are three ways of knowing things—by our senses, by our reason and by our soul itself—therefore from the senses springs appetite, which we have in common with the animals; from reason springs choice, which is man's prerogative; from the intuitive soul, through which man can communicate with the angels, springs will-power. Similarly, as the senses can know nothing except perceptible things, it is only these latter which the appetite desires, and as the intelligence can only be directed to the contemplation of intelligible things, the will power thrives only on spiritual honesty. Man, with a nature capable of reasoning, placed half way between these two extremes, can, at his own choice, by stooping down to the senses or by lifting himself up towards intellect, give himself up to his desire for the one or the other. There are, then, two ways of desiring beauty, which general term applies to all things, natural or artificial, composed in correct proportion and on a scale exactly suited to their nature.

Bembo began thus, and then, at a time when nothing, neither hate nor love, was platonic and in a circle of men seething with brutal passions, he went on to talk of ideal beauty, which was nothing else but "the real trophy of the soul's victory, when, through divine virtue, it masters physical nature and by its light dominates the darkness of the body." He said

It is an effluvium of divine goodness, which, in truth, spreads itself over all created things, as sunlight does. When, however, it comes upon a well proportioned face which possesses a certain fortunate harmony of colouring and is enhanced by correct lines and well arranged measurements, this effluvium of the divine goodness seizes upon that face and shines from it in its greatest beauty, for it embellishes and illuminates with a marvellous grace and splendour the subject on which it shines, as a ray of sunlight does when it falls upon a fine gold vase encrusted and diversified with precious stones. Thus it attracts human eyes to it and through them it penetrates to the soul and impresses itself there, filling the soul with a new grace and enflaming it with desire for itself.

No objection to this general theory being raised, he continued :

If, then, the soul, seized with a desire to enjoy this beauty as being something good, allows itself to be guided by the judgment of the senses, it falls into the gravest possible errors Thinking that the body, in which beauty is discernible, is the principal cause of that beauty, it considers that to enjoy the latter, it must be united as intimately as possible with the former—which is false . for he who imagines that in possessing the body he will enjoy beauty is wrong, for he is moved, not by true knowledge due to the choice of reason, but by a false opinion due to the appetite of the senses from which it follows that the pleasure which ensues is necessarily a false and lying one And all those lovers who achieve their desire fall into one or the other of these two evils either they are overcome, from the moment their desire is satisfied, not only with satiety and boredom, but also with hatred for the loved one, as if appetite were repenting of its mistake and realized the trap set for it by the false judgment of the senses, which made it think that evil was good , or else they remain possessed with the same desire and the same greed as those who have never reached the goal at which they were aiming

These premises being admitted—and they are very true—I maintain that the contrary is the case with those of ripe age If the latter, in whom the soul is no longer weighed down by the body and whose natural ardours are beginning to slacken, are enflamed by beauty and turn towards it, guided by a reasonable choice, then they are not deceived and they possess this beauty in perfection

The audience followed him with extreme attention. Whilst he was speaking Bembo could see, by the dancing light of torches and by the flickering lamps, those rough, strange masks emerge from the shadows to grimace at him, in a way not unlike that in which we see them now against their dark backgrounds within their frames in the Pitti or the Uffizi, their features distinguishable enough but

their souls impenetrable, for most of them had not yet passed through the test of the events which, later on, revealed them. There was, there, Francesco Maria della Rovere who, before that same year had passed, was to cut the throat of his guest, Giovanni Andrea, in circumstances of the most shameful treason, and subsequently to murder Cardinal Alidosi in the open street, there was the Marquis Phoebus de la Ceva, notorious afterwards for the murder of one of his cousins, there was Pietro da Napoli, whose rapacity and cruelty became renowned, and several other wild beasts. But is it not better thus? For the miracle of Orpheus or of Saint Gérasime to be accomplished beasts were needed as well as saints. Finally, the orator could see in front of him Bibbiena, shameless in his ambitions, capable of betraying one day the hosts who were pampering him at that very moment, and Giuliano de Medici, whose intrigue with the beautiful Pacifica Brandano was to bequeath to the *hospice* of Urbino a foundling, afterwards famous under the name of Cardinal Ippolito de Medici.

Giuliano had just been upholding the honour of the ladies of his time against the enterprise of young gallants Bembo, turning to him, answered him thus

I would have this lady show more courtesy to my courtier of ripe age than my Lord Magnifico's shows to her gallant; and I am justified because my courtier only desires honest things, all of which the lady can accord him without being blamed. But my Lord Magnifico's lady, who is not so certain of the modesty of

the youthful courtier, can only grant him the honest things and must refuse him the dishonest. For this reason mine is the happier man in that everything he asks is granted him, whereas with the other a part is granted and a part refused. And that you may better realize that rational love is a happier thing than sensual love I will tell you that the very things which must always be refused to sensual love may be granted to rational love, because though in the former they are dishonest in the latter they are honest.

Thus the lady, to please her honest lover, besides granting him pleasant smiles and familiar and lively observations, besides talking, laughing and touching his hand, can even go reasonably and blamelessly as far as a kiss—which in sensual love, according to my Lord Magnifico's rules, is not allowed, because the kiss, being partly of the body and partly of the soul, is dangerous in that the sensual lover may be drawn towards the bodily part of it rather than to that of the soul—but the rational lover knows that though the mouth is a part of the body, from it issue words (which are the interpreters of the soul) and that inner breath or spirit which is also called the soul. And for this reason he delights in kissing the lips of the lady he loves, not so that he may be stirred by any dishonest desire but because he feels that by this union a way is opened to both their souls, which, drawn by their desire for one another flow together and mingle one with another, so that each of them then has two souls. And a single one of these two, thus composed, almost controls two bodies. So that a kiss may be said to be a union of souls rather than of bodies, because it has so much strength of its own that it draws the soul to itself and almost separates it from the body.

But besides these benefits, the lover will find another and even greater one, if he will make use of this love as a ladder to raise himself to something much more sublime. He will succeed in this if, inwardly considering how restricted a thing it is to keep himself always tied to contemplating the beauty of a single being, and desiring to get free from these very narrow limits, he will, by taking thought, add to that beauty such embellishments that he will gather to himself all the beauties, and thus form a universal concept of them, finally reducing their multitude to the unity of that single one which is so widely spread over the whole of human nature.

It was getting late, but they were listening so intently that they did not seem to notice the passage of time. There is, in the legends of the Golden Age, a tale of a marvellous bird which came and sang one morning at the windows of a monastery and led away after it from tree to tree into the very depths of the forest a young monk who was curious to hear more of the song. When evening came the good monk went back to his monastery but scarcely recognized either his brother monks or even himself, when he saw himself doubled up with age and with a long white beard. He had spent a hundred years listening to the Celestial Bird and had thought that it was but a day!

Those who heard Bembo were likewise enraptured.

He continued thus

In what mortal language, then, O most holy love, shall your praises worthily be sung? Very beautiful, very good, very holy, you spring from the union of beauty and goodness and divine wisdom in that union you dwell and in it, as in a circle, you return to us. You are the world's gentle chain, connecting heavenly with earthly things, inclining the higher virtues to the governance of the lesser ones, bringing back our souls to their source and uniting them to it. You muster the elements of peace, you urge nature to produce and that which is born to the perpetuation of life. To things divided you give union, to things imperfect perfection, to unlikes resemblance, to enemies friendship, to the earth its fruits, to the sea calm, to the sky the light which brings life. May you be the father of true pleasures and graces, of peace, meekness and benevolence, and the enemy of barbarous violence and lethargy. May you be in everything the beginning and the end of all that is good. Correct the errors of the senses, and, after their long madness, give them true and lasting well being make us aware of the spiritual fragrance which quickens the virtue of intelligence and

## *Celebrities of the Italian Renaissance*

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make us hear the celestial harmony in such perfect unison that discordant passion shall find no place in our hearts

Intoxicate us at that pure spring of happiness which always exhilarates and never wearies, and whose fresh and limpid waters give to all who drink them the taste of true blessedness. With the rays of your light, wipe the film of ignorance from our eyes so that we may no longer admire perishable beauty and may learn that things are not truly what they first appear to us to be. Receive our souls, which we offer you as a sacrifice, and consume them in that bright flame which purifies from all material grossness, so that, separated from the body in all things, they may be joined to divine beauty by a gentle and eternal bond. And thus enraptured, outside our own selves, like true lovers may we be able to transform ourselves into the loved object, and, raising ourselves above the earth, be invited to the angels' feast, where, nourished on ambrosia and immortal nectar, we may at last achieve a happy life-in-death, as did before us those Fathers of old whose souls, by the ardent virtue of contemplation, you enraptured and joined with God.

Thus he spoke and remained there, motionless and silent, his eyes to Heaven, in ecstasy, *come stupido*. Then the beautiful Emilia Pia, who was also known as Emilia *Impia*, on account of her quick and sometimes caustic mind, laid her fingers on the lappet of his coat and pulled it gently.

"Take care, Messer Pietro," she said, "that with all these ideas of yours, your soul, too, does not quit your body."

To which Bembo, suddenly awakened, replied in all seriousness :

"Well, that would not be the first miracle which Love has worked in me!"

Then all of them, with their minds relaxed, began to laugh and talk at once. The discussion was

starting again on the same high level when the Duchess cut it short by saying

"To be continued to-morrow!"

"No, this evening," said someone

"How do you mean, this evening?" asked the Duchess

"Because it is already morning"

In a second everyone stood up and went to the windows. It was true. Dawn was already tinging the sky and laying her first roses on the high summits of Mount Catria. The stars had vanished, the crisp morning air was coming over the hills and in the murmuring forests the concert of the awakened birds was beginning. They went off to their own rooms, for the first time without having to light their torches, and without waking their slumbering pages. Pietro Bembo, in his own fashion, had just re-enacted the miracle of the Celestial Bird. A night had passed as though it were but an hour.



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